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ABSTRACT

Thomas Elementary School serves a poor, predominantly Latino neighborhood in Chicago (Illinois). This paper reviews some of the developments within each of the school's three sites of power--parents, the principal, and the faculty--and considers the important role of social capital in this immigrant community. Data were obtained through observation and interviews with the principal, teacher leaders, parents, and members of the school community. During the 4 years of observation, the Thomas school community progressed from a stage of uncertain politics when the principal was new, to a maintenance politics when the first school-improvement plan and budget were written, to an emergent democracy where contentious issues of bilingual education were debated. The school also saw developments in school-improvement activities from an early stage of peripheral academic initiatives, to a first stage of systemic change labeled "emergent restructuring." Factors for successful change included an active, supportive parent group; a principal with a vision for a bilingual school who encouraged participative decision making; committed teacher leaders; and trust between parents and professionals. Positive social relations enhanced democratic participation, which strengthened social capital, which in turn facilitated systemic educational change. (Contains 45 endnotes and 24 references.) (LMI)

The Road to Emergent Restructuring and Strong Democracy: One Chicago School's Experience of Reform

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The Thomas School Community

Thomas Elementary School[1] serves as a port of entry neighborhood. The first residents arrived from Bohemia, Lithuania, Croatia, Slovenia, Poland, and Italy just prior to the turn of the century. Mexicans, especially from the rural province of Michoacan, did not begin to arrive until the 1950's. Over the next thirty years the majority of whites moved out and they became the dominant presence. A longtime resident described it this way:

> When I first came here, about 1960, I lived in this block here. There used to be only three Latino families...the others were all Bohemians...it was just changing gradually, where now, I don't think there are. . . there must only be three Anglo [families left].

The neighborhood has always been overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, and the church plays a significant role in the community. Churches with names like Blessed Teresa of Bohemia and Our Lady of Czestochowa now offer Sunday mass in Spanish and English. Many community groups hold meetings and activities in church buildings, and some social service agencies find space for their programs in them as well.

More than half of the adults residents (60%) are employed. Most, however, work in minimum wage jobs in the service industry and small factories that dot Chicago's metropolitan ring, and so the median family income for the neighborhood is only $19,000. More than 25% of the families live below the poverty line.

Though the families are poor, the majority of children (75%) live in modest apartments with two-parents in the home.[2] While this creates significant stability for them, mobility in the neighborhood and consequently in the school is still alarmingly high as families struggle to pool their resources and move out of the neighborhood to safer and less dense sections of the city and

suburbs. There is a lot of movement back and forth from Mexico too, as those who are legal residents save money to go "home" for extended visits, especially at Christmas and in the summertime. Families also try to save money to bring relatives up from Mexico. Because Mexico has come upon especially hard times economically, many of the children who are presently arriving from Mexico have attended little or no school. Consequently, they have ever increasing instructional needs. Marta Vega, the School Community Representative (SCR) who has lived in the community for more than thirty years commented about this trend:

> We were all from Mexico, but at the beginning we used to get the kids at the school [who] would be all ready. They would be kids that had schooling [in Mexico]...Now we have a hard time with them because some of them don't even go to school. They haven't even gone to school in Mexico.

During the same period that the school community was changing from Anglo to Latino, city politics were also undergoing a transition. Increasingly, in a city that was nearly evenly divided between white and black voters, Latinos represented an important swing vote. The community has always been a stronghold for machine politics. In the early days the white ethnics who lived there were guaranteed a healthy measure of patronage jobs if they delivered the vote for the aldermanic candidate favored by City Hall, and Democratic candidates both national and local. When the neighborhood changed to Latino, it remained a machine stronghold, long after several other predominantly Latino communities had flexed more independent muscle and broken--or at least weakened--their ties to the regulars downtown.

Tony Antonetti, a stalwart of the Democratic machine, represented this community from the 1950's through the 1980's. Early in his tenure he used patronage jobs to maintain his control. As these jobs dried up, his ties to the infamous Chicago mob struck fear in the hearts of many

who might otherwise have opposed him for office or voted against him. Antonetti was eventually convicted on multiple charges of mail fraud and racketeering. Forced to resign from City Council, he died shortly thereafter.

With Antonetti finally out of the way, a political struggle for control of the ward ensued as Latino and white candidates campaigned against each other for the first time. At first, it looked like the independents would win. Roberto Vazquez, a young Mexican-American aligned with Harold Washington, was elected to Antonetti's seat. But when "Council Wars" broke out during Washington's first mayoral term, Vazquez switched sides to vote with the regular machine.[3] This move caused him to lose favor with the independents, and also some of the regulars who did not trust his changing political stripes. Their lack of active support and money paved the way for Raul Cisneros, a Mexican-American who owned a neighborhood bar, to win the ward with the solid backing of the Democratic machine.

Many activists in the larger Thomas neighborhood took advantage of the fact that their community was such hotly contested political terrain. While the regulars and independents fought each other, they successfully lobbied City Hall for several big capital improvement projects during these years. These included the rehabilitation and refurbishing of several local park district facilities as well as the construction of a new, state-of-the-art library. In addition, in response to community pressure about overcrowding in Latino schools, the CPS built a new high school and magnet elementary school in the neighborhood. Several of the individuals involved in these campaigns later won seats on Thomas's first LSC. They brought the considerable background experience and skills that they had learned in these other activities to their work at the school.[4]

According to residents, the biggest problem facing them--more serious than poverty,

deteriorating housing stock, and political cat fights--is gang activity and associated drug trafficking. To fend off the gangs, the City Intervention Network (CIN) is active in this neighborhood and so is the group Mothers Against Drugs (MAD). Many of the local schools work in concert with the police, the Boys Club, the Young Men's Christian Association, and other CBOs and social service agencies to create before and after-school and summer programs that provide youth with some alternatives to gangs.

Many of the agencies that offer these programs have longstanding ties to the community. They have changed their programs and staff over the years to reflect transitions in the neighborhood. One of the best known is Neighbors Working Together (NWT) which, among other things, sponsors an annual summer street festival. In the past this was a parade of Slavic and Italian bands, ethnic costumes and cuisine. For the last decade the music, dance, food, and costumes of different Mexican regions are featured, and the organization's membership is now solidly Latino.

School History and Background

Pre-reform Principals

The shifting demographics of the neighborhood changed the school population as well. And just as the new residents became more savvy about how to participate in politics at the city level, some parents at Thomas also became more challenging of the status quo and outspoken about their concerns.

Today most of the Spanish dominant parents who have been around the school community for a long time speak negatively about Mr. Lanier, who was principal from the mid-sixties until

the mid-eighties. Lanier was white, middle aged, and did not speak any Spanish. Most parents' criticisms related to language issues. They were frustrated that they could not speak directly with their child's principal. Some also alleged that he was unfair toward the bilingual program, possibly even guilty of illegally diverting resources from it. For example, one parent told us:

> In prior years it was very difficult for me to have a conversation with Lanier because I would always need to have Mrs. Vega [the bilingual school community representative] interpret for me. . .I would get so frustrated that I was not understood. . .He was here about twenty years. Finally we started to wake up, and we were never satisfied with him. That is when we started. But in those days, it was difficult to get rid of a principal. . .We knew lots of things that he was not doing right. We were always fighting with him, about bilingual education, regarding when children go into the bilingual program or into the monolingual program. [translation]

Similarly, another parent reported:

> We started a fight at school because the principal at that time was manipulating the bilingual positions. It got to the point that we had to sit down with the principal and ask him to account for what was happening. I asked him, `According to the number of students, we are supposed to have so many bilingual teachers. . . according to a formula we are supposed to have so many teachers paid by the Board [of Education], and so many teachers paid by the state. I want to know where those teachers are?'. . . We knew that he was using other positions, for example, he would place an Anglo in a bilingual position, when we had more and more need for [bilingual] teachers. In fact, I remember we took this to a higher level, to the Central Office, and we went through the entire process so that there would be an investigation. [translation]

According to this same group of parents, the school did not fare much better when Lanier left and central office assigned his temporary replacement:

> When Lanier left we had an interim principal who was a disaster. . .I don't know where she came from. . .I think I was more prepared for the job than that woman! It was during that time that I decided to switch my daughter to Catholic school, because I thought that the [interim] principal was going to stay. . .Things were just not right.

Parent involvement. Parents' frustration with the administration at Thomas did not diminish their involvement in the school over time. Rather, it galvanized this group of Spanish dominant mothers to spend time in the building and monitor the principal's activities. Many became active as volunteers, and they learned to convince other parents to become involved in the school as well. Head Start was their recruiting station, the place where they first met new, young parents, and watched to see what their skills and interests were. Some of the volunteers we talked with explained that the program served as a training ground for their leadership development.[5]

> There are always a lot of parents participating in Head Start since everyone knows it's a good program for your kids, and parents have to participate. . .It's important [because it's] the only way that we can identify people for the school, you can see that they like [being involved] or you see that they have some special interest. Then you can invite them and say, `Let's go. Come here. Come to this meeting. Help us with this. Help us with that.' [translation]

Olga Rodriguez, a volunteer parent who was later to become a member of the first LSC, echoed this sentiment:

> What made me more active in the school, in reality, was that I had to be a volunteer for the Head Start program. . .From there, I was identified as one of the parents who was going to help more in the school as a volunteer. In those years there was the PTA and for a year or two I was vice president of the PTA. Later on, there was the Bilingual Advisory Council. It's like an assignment that--once you get into it--it keeps on following. [translation]

Parents like Olga attribute much of their leadership status--and later election to the LSC--to these prior volunteer experiences:

> They [all of the volunteer activities] helped me become a leader. Because I was seen as participating in [school] activities. . .When you see a lot of a person in school, and that they are helping, well then later people say, `Let's get that lady. She can come and participate. . . She can be a leader for the school.' There are a lot of [committee] presidents that are needed for different things. The PTA, the Bilingual Council, [for

example]. There were some people very active in the Bilingual Council years ago. [translation][6]

All of these committees and activities created opportunities for parents to get to know each other, develop leadership skills, and interact in meaningful ways with staff. Several of the women involved with Head Start, PTA and the Bilingual Council were also members of the Local School Improvement Council (LSIC) prior to reform. This was an advisory group that preceded the LSC. Its most important function was to interview principal candidates sent to the school by central office, and rank-order the candidates on a list that was then sent to the sub-district superintendent for final selection. Consequently, when the time came for Thomas to retire their interim principal and participate in the selection of her replacement, the LSIC created a committee made up of parents and teachers. They developed an interview protocol, and met with each candidate sent by the Board. They then forwarded three names to the sub-district superintendent. A parent who participated in these deliberations described the process to us:

> Eventually they [the Board of Education] officially opened up the position, and there were many candidates. I remember that it was during the summer, in August, when we had to go to the interviews. . .We wanted the principal to start in September. There were many good candidates. . . Some of them had one thing [to offer], others had another. There were a number of Anglos--even some who spoke Spanish. But I don't know, for "x" reasons, we made our choice for Sanchez. . .It was the desire of the parents. It was an agreement because in no way were we going to accept that they impose a principal on us who they sent from central office. [translation]

Teachers. Interestingly, many teachers who had joined the faculty during Lanier's tenure, did not share parents' negative sentiment about him. For example, Kathy Porter, a first grade teacher in the monolingual program, summed up the feelings of a lot of her colleagues when she told us: "I loved the principal at that time. He was a very dynamic person." Kathy went on, however, to tell us that "there was something about Thomas School"--beyond the principal--that

made it a good place to be:

> I'm not sure totally what the whole picture is. . . partly it's the children we service--I think they're nice children. Partly it's the training, partly, it's the teachers that are here. Although the faculty certainly hasn't been the same in the years that I've been here. That does change, of course, but there's some element of Thomas. . .It's just a really nice place to be. . .There's a spirit that surrounds the school. And the parents seem very involved. I worked with a lot of parents over the years that I still see, and they are my friends.

In addition to the principal's dynamism, then, Kathy attributes her fondness for Thomas to a "spirit." While she cannot draw the "whole picture," her sketch begins to draw out the importance of several key social resources; positive social relations, faculty collegiality, the opportunity to work with "nice" children, and a parent group that is friendly and involved.

Issues of Bilingual and Monolingual Education at Thomas

More than a third of the children who attend Thomas come from homes where Spanish is the primary language spoken. Children are given a *Home Language Survey* when they first enroll to determine their dominant language.[7] If it is English, then students are assigned to the monolingual program, where English is the only language of instruction. Roughly half of the students are placed in this "regular" program.

In cases where languages other than English are spoken at home, the *Functional Language Assessment* is given.[8] Once again, children who are assessed as English dominant are placed in the monolingual program, while students categorized as Limited English proficient (LEP) are assigned to the bilingual program. This is a "transitional" program. Here instruction in the core content areas (language arts, mathematics, science) is in Spanish. Students are taught English as a Second Language (ESL) at the same time, with the aim that within three years they will be ready to transfer into the "regular" program of the school. Beginning in 1976 the state

mandated this approach in schools serving twenty or more LEP students of the same language group.[9]

In theory, teachers in the regular and bilingual programs are supposed to cover the same content material at the same time. Only the language of instruction is supposed to differ. This coordination is intended to ensure that children's need for language instruction has not limited their exposure to the full curriculum, thus easing their transition from bilingual to regular.

In practice, however, such coordination is often lacking, and it is not the only obstacle to children's transition from bilingual to "regular." To the contrary, opinions differ about the optimal amount of time for students to be in the bilingual program. Debate about the importance of maintaining children's native language and culture, versus their rapid assimilation into the dominant culture, is another point of contention.[10] There is also concern about discipline as many parents and teachers perceive the bilingual students to be more respectful of adult authority and better behaved. This too has implications for how long students stay in the bilingual program. Testing is another issue as students in the bilingual program are generally exempt from taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for three years.[11] Finally, in many schools an interest group politics develops around each program. This sets them in competition against each other for resources; for example, materials, space, students and teachers' positions.[12]

These conflicts about bilingual education are not unique to Thomas. Rather they beset most schools serving large LEP populations and have profound consequences on school organization, culture, climate and politics. Even more problematic perhaps than these issues themselves, is the fact that they are rarely discussed. At Thomas, for example, prior to the arrival of Sanchez, these controversies were not the subject of faculty meetings, meetings of the Bilingual

Advisory Committee, nor any other public forum of the school. Instead, they simmered just below the surface--grist for the mill in the private conversations of the parents quoted above, and within each of the two faculty groups. Bringing these issues and cleavages into the open would be the initial campaign of the new principal. Healing splits and reaching consensus about pedagogical approaches eventually would become a key reform goal of teachers at the school.

Sanchez' Arrival and His Change Agenda

Envisioning a Truly Bilingual School

Jorge Sanchez was born in Chile. A slight, soft-spoken man, Sanchez is most comfortable talking in Spanish. In his native country he worked as a teacher and administrator and received his doctorate in child development there. In 1979 he came to the CPS and got a job as an administrator in central office. Certified to become a principal in 1988,[13] he was appointed to Thomas six months later. He took stewardship of a severely overcrowded school. It served more than eight hundred children--from pre-school through sixth grade--in a main building that had been designed for no more than five hundred students, a leased branch located several blocks away, and five corrugated tin mobile units set up in the parking lot. The mobiles were old, drafty and depressing. Grades pre-kindergarten through four were housed in them and the main building while the older children in grades five and six were housed at the branch. It was 1988--a year before reform. Sanchez offered his vision of the school he hoped that Thomas would become at his first meeting with the faculty:

> I want this to be a really bilingual school, where all of you are bilingual so that you can talk with all of the students. . .a school where there's no split between the instructional programs, and where teachers and students don't look down on each

> other. A school where everyone speaks Spanish and English. A school for this community.

Many on the faculty was stunned by their principal's first words. Kathy said:

> In the regular program we were all threatened at first. . .Well, give me a break! Wouldn't you be? It sounded like we didn't have a choice. Speak Spanish or get fired. . .

Lillian Adams, an intermediate level bilingual teacher, reacted to the same speech--and the gossip that swirled in its aftermath--in a more reasoned way:

> Sure, I've heard people say that the administration doesn't like people who don't speak Spanish. . .But I have never heard him say anything to that extent; that you must be a bilingual teacher. I have heard him talk about upgrading skills to be able to be assigned anywhere in the building. He encouraged us when he came to the building to go back [to school] and take a class and get our [bilingual] certificate. What's wrong with that?

Sanchez was well aware that his words were provocative. Several years later he marveled at the "naivete" of his first remarks, and said that he had learned "how to tone down quite a bit." Nevertheless, in a school where there was such conflict between the two programs, a community hungry for answers, but no extensive discussion of the problems, he felt compelled to take an initial strong position.

> There are many realities here, and what happens is that my teachers and my community do not know each other's reality. They are afraid to accept their realities. My teachers are afraid to know that their teaching is not up to date. They are afraid to realize they have lost the respect of a community. They are afraid to realize any of this, because realizing it would cause pain. I have eight teachers that are overreacting to me--in terms of me being a bilingual principal who is going to change this to a truly bilingual school. And I say, `Sure, if the community needs a bilingual school, I'm going to create a bilingual school.' And that creates a lot of anxiety. But without some anxiety, there won't be any change.

Partnerships with Parents

In fact, Sanchez' definition of a "school for this community" extended far beyond the

boundaries of language. Sanchez' personal vision aligned with what was about to become the city's "reform agenda." And like some of reform's more radical advocates, Sanchez was overtly critical of the "colonial" mentality that was pervasive in neighborhood schools like his:

> . . .schooling is a very domesticating experience. . .especially in inner city schools where you find a tremendous gap between the values of the home and the place that is supposed to be a neighborhood school. . . .We're trying to colonize the students, actually, to make them think like we do in the school. That's one of the reasons for school failure--the tremendous gap that exists between school and parents and the fact that we put ourselves in the position of enforcer; we're always telling our parameters to them.

Part of his vision was to create a respectful partnership with parents, such that parents could help to determine the values of the school. In English that is labored, Sanchez contrasts the present reality with the opportunities for a new beginning under reform:

> [In the past] parents only cooperation and only collaborative effort was that they were asked to bring coffee and cake to the school. . . That was the only partnership that we had. In terms of restructuring--rethinking schools, reforming schools--[I think] its time to establish a real partnership [with parents]. Or at a minimum establish an equal beginning. . . That creates the opportunity to actually define a school with common values--where the school has to provide the elements and the ingredients and the tools so the home can contribute the values. Then the values of the home can become the values of the neighborhood school.

Sanchez also talked about the potential for change and "people's" empowerment that could come with decentralization and enhanced participation:

> From the perspective of reform, people have been given opportunity to change with the system. By becoming part of the system, getting themselves involved in thinking for the system, they have power in the system. So in terms of systemic change, reform creates this opportunity.

A challenge to realizing a "real partnership" with parents and also their empowerment in this poor community, however, was their need for the information and skills that would enable them to function in a partnership with professionals. Thus community education would be critical

to building the kind of bilingual school that the principal envisioned and the new reform promoted.

Efforts to Empower a Faculty

Sanchez realized that if he was to change Thomas, he could not do it alone. In addition to a partnership with parents, he needed the support of his faculty. He also became aware during those first few months of his administration that teachers' commitment to improvement and reform was uneven. One problem was the fact that a sizeable core of teachers was "not up to date" in terms of best practice, nor knowledgeable about some of the child development issues critical to being a good elementary teacher. He said:

> If you ask some teachers--without giving them the opportunity to prepare and go review a psychology 101 book--they don't know the clientele. They don't know the way kids react. They have basic knowledge, but when you start talking a little bit about Piaget's theory, the concept of moral development, those things for teachers are very, very sketchy. So my question is: How can teachers deal adequately with these processes, when they don't really know anything about the children or the way the developmental processes work?

Sanchez was also keenly aware of differences within the faculty in terms of teachers' commitment to a reform agenda and school change. With regard to the non-participants, Sanchez described an attitude of deference that had been cultivated by his predecessors:

> [When I first became principal] I had weekly faculty meetings. However, I found myself talking, talking, talking, asking questions, and nobody would react. Finally, it was the sixth meeting, and so that means I had spent almost two months listening to myself. Finally someone said, `Excuse me, with all due respect, I would like to say something!' So the ritual that these individuals were accustomed to [when Lanier and the interim were principal]--was to see the principal as the authority figure. Well, and what goes with that is you don't challenge a principal. Because if you challenge the principal, what's gonna happen? As a teacher? Good riddance. So they didn't challenge the principal. They weren't ready to challenge the principal. It is interesting to see how teachers develop the relationships that they have with their principal.

Sanchez surmises that in addition to being threatened by his formal role, some of these same teachers were intimidated by his expertise:

> For the first time, I believe that many of my teachers found a person that can talk about instruction--teaching and learning--more than they know. So I became a very threatening person to them. I become a threat. `He is psychologist,' they whispered. ` He can talk about methods of teaching.' At the beginning [i.e. before reform] knowing something was a threat.

Some teachers were puzzled too by his desire for them to participate. Similar to his work with parents, Sanchez needed to develop in his faculty the desire, skills and knowledge base necessary to their becoming involved and assuming leadership roles:

> [At first] there was this fear of sharing information. I wanted them to read about people becoming empowered by having access to information. About the reform. About good teaching. I think that the teachers' union tried to deliver this same message to teachers. But [some] teachers were not taking advantage of it. . .They didn't want to take the opportunity to get information so they can make informed decisions. Because it has to come to the point in Chicago--in reform--that after you have been given the opportunity, after you have given things to them on a silver plate, if they have not absorbed this information, they are going to continue making decisions that are not informed. And at that point, there will be other people who will take their place.

While he acknowledges that "not everybody should be involved in governance" Sanchez finds this non-participation, and the complaining that often went with it, frustrating:

> And I do have some people that, if they are asked ten years from now, `Were you part of the decision making at Thomas School when reform was passed?' They'd say, `No.' But if you question them like lawyers do, you ask: `Have you had the opportunity to order materials on your own?' And they say, `Oh! Sure.' `Well then you are making decisions, huh?' And that's the thing. It's that some individuals do not want to be part of the government. I'm not saying everybody should be in the government. But if the opportunity is there, and if they don't use it, it is because they are putting up barriers. . .Their own constraints. They are then seen as individuals who are not committed, they don't want to do the work. Some are just lazy; they don't want to come, they don't want to participate, and they don't want to be cooperative.

Sanchez contrasted this group with a small core of teachers that included Kathy Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Carol Jameson, Wendy O'Reilley, Beverly Sherman, Janet Reyes, and Lillian Adams. Thoughtful, smart and hard working, they were energetic and discriminating about seeking out good programs and processes that might improve the school. Most importantly, they also represented both the bilingual and monolingual programs of the school.

It was Lillian, for example, had been invited to the committee that drafted the CANAL proposal. This was a plan for using federal desegregation money that was developed in the late 1980's. An acronym for "Creating a New Approach to Learning," Project CANAL went into some of the most racially isolated CPS schools where student achievement was very low. The aim was to train parents and professionals in site based management and consensus decision making. Thomas was selected to be in the first group of CANAL schools a year prior to reform, in part because of Lillian's involvement.

During the first year of CANAL's implementation, facilitators were made available to support the development of new participatory structures and train school based teams. That first year CANAL also paid for a cadre of substitute teachers to come into the school, so that the full faculty could engage in three days of school improvement planning and training in group process at CANAL headquarters. Once some of these initial meetings had taken place, CANAL organized a number of school-based "design teams" at each site to discuss pedagogy in reading and math, assessment methods, and parent involvement. Lillian and Sanchez functioned as CANAL's local advocates. They successfully encouraged teachers, auxiliary staff and parents to participate in these activities. The CANAL process was institutionalized at Thomas to a greater extent than many other schools, in large part due to the level of broad participation that was

sparked and sustained.

Lillian supplemented the CANAL trainings with news, information and readings that she received from the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). As the school's union delegate, she participated in most of the workshops and trainings that the union was developing at that time around issues of school restructuring and reform. Many of these were organized for teams of teachers to participate from a school, and again, Lillian was successful in recruiting a core group to go with her.

Lillian and this core teacher group sought out relationships with universities in the area as well. Even prior to reform they had been trained in whole language instruction, portfolio assessment, and "Teaching Integrated Math and Science" (TIMS). Most of these activities were initiated by individual teachers. Depending on the specific topic of the training, however, these teachers were often able to interest a few of their colleagues beyond the core group. Thus small pockets of subject specific professional communities were sprouting throughout the school.

In contrast to their colleagues who felt threatened by the new principal, these pro-active teachers viewed Sanchez as an ally. This was especially true given their own goals regarding professional development: "From the very beginning," Beverly Sherman, a fourth grade teacher told us, "We appreciated that positive part of him that makes us very enthusiastic about trying a lot of new things."

Sanchez, in turn, knew that he needed to rely on this group of teachers so that they might help him to motivate other people and provide support and leadership for some of the initiatives that he envisioned for the school. Moreover, he needed to protect their energy, so that they might encourage his more negative group and not "burn out" themselves.

> Then there are my other teachers--they want to do it all. They sometimes take on too much. The over-committed persons. And when you get these two groups together, then you have a faculty that is divided. So you know, here is my dilemma; how to try to encourage the non-committed and keep the rest from burning out.

Comment

What can we say about Thomas at the beginning of reform with regard to resources of the school community, its school improvement efforts and politics? In *Making Democracy Work* Putnam describes the social capital of a successful civic community. It is one that has, among its resources, strong trust among members, norms of "reciprocal engagement," and dense collaborative networks.[14] In the communities that Putnam studied, these resources developed over time, and committed members both to each other and voluntary service to the common good.

As reform gets underway at Thomas we see evidence of this kind of social capital as well. Activist parents have recently selected their new principal, and having done so, they seem willing to step back and trust him to run the school. A core group of teachers has been engaged in continuing education, union and other work for several years. They are close colleagues, accustomed to working together, and dedicated to improving themselves so that they might better serve their students. Most importantly, teachers such as Kathy demonstrate a real fondness for the children and families of the school community. Even in a school where there is high mobility, as a first grade teacher Kathy stays in contact with some of the students and parents as they progress through the grades.

With regard to school improvement activities, we refer to Bryk et al. *A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago* to frame our analysis. In 1993 Bryk et al.

published an assessment of the state of reform in Chicago.[15] Using a combination of case study and survey analysis, the authors identified four "types" of local school politics, and also four "types" of school improvement efforts.[16] With regard school improvement, the authors describe a type of "unfocused academic initiative" which they label "peripheral academic change."[17] Such activity, they assert, is characterized by an "accrual of add-on programs, a limited focus on core academics, an absence of coherent planning, and a minimum of resource seeking." We would suggest that Thomas fits two of these four criteria. Teachers do, in fact, actively search for continuing education opportunities. Their selection process is not a coherent or strategic one, however. Rather, they participate in the new opportunities of reform (and those like CANAL that became available just prior to reform) as these present themselves. While several of these activities are concerned with core academics--for example, whole language, integrated math and science--it is unlikely that their efforts will improve teaching and learning over-all. We say this because in 1991 teachers have no plan for developing school wide initiatives, or even for expanding their new ideas beyond the pocket of interested and self-selected teachers who have opted to participate.

The politics of the school community are much harder to frame in the context of the Bryk et al. report at this early stage. This is in large measure because principals play such a central role in school politics, and yet in 1991, neither parents nor the faculty know too much about their new principal. It is interesting to note that the group of teachers that we have characterized as pro-active was quiet at the faculty meetings when Sanchez first introduced his agenda to the school. When asked about the disjuncture between their passive behavior toward Sanchez when he first came on board and their more assertive behavior as teacher leaders, they gave a very pragmatic

response. Experienced in the old school with principals like Lanier, they were as yet unsure about what reform and their new principal would bring to their lives. Nor were they inclined to regard the principal as their equal, even if he said that was what he wanted. Rather, even as they took the lead in many areas, they were cautious in their first dealings with him, and would continue to be for many years to come.

Consequently, at the advent of reform the relations of power between the principal, parents, and this group of teachers presented an enigma. Thomas was assigned an inexperienced principal who talked about colonialism, parent and teacher empowerment, and unifying the two halves of the school. Most importantly, he espoused equal partnerships across the three sites of power. Most parents in this community, however, did not have the information or skills to function on an equal footing with professionals. Neither did a sizeable group of the faculty have the capacities or motivation to collaborate in this way. Ironically, while a small group of teachers was assuming leadership in many aspects of school decision making, they were reticent to collaborate with the principal as equals. Tenured under the old, top-down regime, these veteran teachers would treat their principal with some of the caution and deference that his position traditionally accorded him.

The Era of the First LSC: 1989 - 1991

The First LSC Election

The first major task of reform when school started in 1989 was electing a local school council (LSC). The law directed the principal to organize the first election and Sanchez welcomed this responsibility as a perfect vehicle for beginning the processes of community

education and parent empowerment. He knew that many parents were upset with the previous principals:

> They were ready for some change. They were ready to actually take control. They were eager for control, and that helps. That helps in terms of organizing. It creates a lot of interest in becoming involved.

Nevertheless, in an immigrant community where residents were not accustomed to voting, much less running for office, it still took a great deal of personal effort to educate people about school reform and the role that they might have in it. Sanchez and a handful of teachers spent many of their afternoons that fall going door-to-door to talk with parents and residents to demonstrate their interest in parent involvement and encourage them to run for a seat and/or vote.

> At the beginning it was slow. . .We prepared 5,000 fliers and people kept asking us `Is Vazquez running [for alderman] again?' `No, its not Vazquez. It's something different,' we told them. `It's school reform. We have to vote.' So it was a practice of local politics and that's what a local school council election ought to be. So we passed out fliers, we put ads in the newspaper . . .to make the big announcement, `Please Vote!' [Even so] we had problems getting candidates. If I would have just let it go, the way it was going, there probably wouldn't have been even six candidates for [the parent and community] positions. But we actually demonstrated that we were interested in the process. And so we went door to door.

Campaigning did not end when the work week was over. Sanchez, who commuted from a distant suburb, was back in the neighborhood every weekend. He even asked the priests for time on Sundays to address church congregations:

> I stood in front of all the Sunday masses and said, `This is reform. . .Why don't you exercise your rights?'...That's when I said, `You're talking to a person that is willing to commit himself for the cause'. . .And I was ready. I was not only ready for this to happen successfully. It's a matter that we have to excel and we have to do it. We have to get all these things done.

In addition to the efforts of the professional staff to draw attention to the elections, there

was a campaign citywide to publicize the elections and encourage voter turn-out. The local, Latino media was very active in this, as were some of the advocacy and community-based organizations in the neighborhood. Olga said:

> In our case at Thomas, the organization that helped coordinate [the elections] was NTW. A group went over and we had meetings starting as early as the summer. In the summer of '89, we started to plan for the elections that were to take place. [translation]

NTW persuaded those parents and community residents who came to their meetings to run for the council on a slate. Some Thomas parents chose this strategy while others ran individual campaigns. For example, Peter Cerwinski, who eventually became the LSC chair, decided at the last minute to run on his own.

> I'd been involved in the park and the community, but I wasn't involved in the school at the time. . .And so people knew me. And final numbers in the election showed that people knew me. . .I was running against a strong NTW slate. They had a slate of the ten that they wanted, and midway through the day, the slate was torn up, and everybody started going their own way. And members of the slate started endorsing me in the middle of election day. . .I had my own flyers. I put out my own literature. I wrote it. I bilingualed (sic) it. . .I went out solo as a parent. . .I was second with 170 something [votes].

All told, 14 parents at Thomas ran for the 6 available parent slots, while 6 community residents ran for the two community positions. More than 300 parents and nearly 100 community residents voted--a large turn-out relative to that of similar schools in the area.[18] Of those who won, half were from the NTW slate, while the others, like Cerwinski, had campaigned on their own. Without exception, those parents and community members who were elected were known to the parent community through their long term involvement with the school and/or the larger community.

In the first category were women like Olga. Originally from Mexico, she had been

involved at Thomas school for 25 years, dating from the time her oldest child entered Head Start. After that, she was tapped to help on the PTA where she served as vice-president. Later she joined both the LSC and Bilingual Advisory Committee. When reform began only Olga's youngest child was still attending Thomas. She had opted to place her other children at a local parish school, where she was a member of the board. Given her extensive connections inside the school and the community, it was not surprising that Olga got the highest number of votes--over 250. She said:

> I am well known in this school so I campaigned for the other people [on the slate] to encourage people to come out and vote and all that. In the morning we were at the corner very early handing out our cards...a lot of people did come out to vote. [translation]

Two more members of the NTW slate elected as parent representatives to the first council were Maria Robledo and Dolores Rincon. They, like Olga, were natives of Mexico and most comfortable speaking Spanish, even though they had been living in the community and active at the school for many years. Rincon also ran for the LSC at her eldest daughter's high school where she was elected chair.

In the second category of LSC members were individuals respected in the larger community, who, as noted earlier, had been involved in local neighborhood struggles such as the construction of new schools and the library facility. Both groups saw their campaign and election to the LSC as a natural extension of these previous roles. The two community representatives, Miguel Salinas and Jaime Serrano, fit this latter profile.

Interestingly, Cerwinski does not fit neatly into either category. He was the only male parent representative, the only member who did not speak Spanish, and, in his late twenties, he

was considerably younger than the other parents. Originally from Seattle, he had moved to Chicago after several brushes with the law, including some time in jail for armed robbery. Cerwinski told us that his Latina wife "reformed him." Since their recent marriage, his main interests were holding down a steady job, being a good stepfather to her son, Carlos, and service to the Thomas community which he had fully adopted as his own. He initially became involved in the school when Carlos got into some trouble. Cerwinski told his wife that he would "take care of it." Later, he said that the time he spent in Carlos' classroom trying to help resolve his stepson's problems, and talking with the teacher and principal, sensitized him to how hard the professional staff worked on behalf of students. He said:

> All the teachers and the principal are very courteous to the parents. [That's been my experience] in the past five years [that I've been at] the school. It's an open door policy where anyone at anytime can just go into the office. They don't have to knock and sit and wait for an appointment. They don't have to call ahead. It's very comfortable. It's a comfortable feeling.

In fact, Cerwinski thought that teachers deserved better space and working conditions than their over-crowded school allowed:

> I think we gotta find the teachers some private space in the school. We don't have the room, the conditions are hard. [But] I feel we have to give them a private lunchroom. . .closed in. . .Because they really have no quiet time. Everyone in any field, in any job, needs a little bit of quiet time. And that's why you have lunches and breaks. But at Thomas there's nothing [for teachers]. There's just no breaks.

Carlos' discipline problems were short-lived, and so Cerwinski volunteered to coach an after school basketball team. He thought that the children needed a positive, male role model, and that working with them "gave him some direction too." His decision to run for the LSC, while impulsive, was consistent with his vision of providing service while keeping himself on the straight and narrow:

> My wife and I [just decided to] walk over to school and we turned in the application [for the LSC elections]. I think that was one of the best things that could have happened in my life. Being involved in the school has been good to me because working with the kids and for the children is making me work harder for myself. And that's something I lacked. I was into my own problems and I let my problems control my life. I was a severe drunk and a severe drug addict. . .I'm very confident in myself now, what direction I'm going, and what leadership roles I play. I have aspirations down the line as to what direction I'm gonna go.

Once elected, Cerwinski immediately began lobbying to become the LSC chair. "I told the members, all the members, straight up, `I want to be your chairman.'" His only competition came from Rodriguez, who was a formidable opponent. To avoid a contentious decision, the newly formed group decided to hold a lottery, and Cerwinski's name was selected. "It was a lottery," he told us. "My name came out and I took it as a sign that it was meant to be." Nevertheless, Cerwinski knew that his inability to speak Spanish, as well as the fact that he was the only Anglo member and the only male parent member, might present some challenges to his leadership:

> I felt some members on the council didn't so much like the idea that I won the chair seat because I didn't speak Spanish. . .It was not so much a rocky start, as far as the school business goes, but as far as a team working together.

LSC Training

According to the reform law, Public Act 85-1418 (PA 85-1418), each new council was to receive thirty hours of training in the areas of education theory, budget and personnel. Trainings were offered throughout the city from a Citywide Task Force that had recently been organized and funded for this purpose. The Thomas council attended several of these sessions which were held across the city. But Sanchez suggested that these huge, impersonal trainings were more confusing to his council than educational:

> My council was discouraged by some of the training sessions. They didn't want to go back to training, to be trained. . .You know, personally, I came out with a lot of

questions, not confused, but asking myself, `How do people who do not have the background. . . How do they understand?'

Sanchez took exception, for example, to the trainers' emphasis on Roberts Rules of Order which he thought were too cumbersome for his group.

> They [the trainers] were always trying to push down people's throat the Robert's Rules of Order. But these people are not used . . .They themselves may not have the study habits to ask `What's that supposed to do? What's the procedure of putting a motion on the floor and who...?' Especially when you have these complicated motions that people want to amend and go back and forth.

Similarly, Sanchez took issue with the trainers' concern about the Open Meetings Act, a strict interpretation of which dictates that even a chance encounter of three or more council members constitutes a meeting and so is subject to prior public notice:

> So there is a law that says that you cannot have three council members together. . .So . . that's when I interpret the laws the way I see that it is needed. . . .There is no other way to have a good understanding of what this place is, if I don't have all of these people together. To talk about our place. If they don't understand this place, if they don't understand the physical facility, if they don't understand the human resources that we have, if they don't understand the programs that we have at this school, there is no way that they can be creative, original.

With the blessing of his council, Sanchez decided to ignore much of Roberts Rules of Order and also the Open Meetings Act and create an "original" process for council training and meetings that would better fit their community. The trainers had warned councils against being reactive and crisis-oriented. They urged that councils do their homework so that they could assume a more pro-active stance:

> So what do you do when you're told to be pro-active? You kind of put events together and create some kind of process. But that's hard when you've got eleven different people with a variety of backgrounds and knowledge and information, trying to come out with a conclusion about what? About budget? About curriculum? About children's education when they don't even know what programs we have here? Something had to be glued together. So what we did is

> just two mornings, we met. And I explained in detail exactly what Thomas School is all about. From the physical facility to the money, to the qualifications of teachers, to what should be required. . .From that point on, they were a little more secure.

Embracing the role of teacher at first, Sanchez was mindful that his council could not develop the skills they needed if they remained dependent on him. Rather, he aspired for them have access to the information so that eventually they could make their own decisions.

> [At first] you are the stockholder, you're the power broker, you're the only one who has the information. So I had to lecture at LSC meetings. . because I was the only one who had the information. But later I would say that my role should become more of a facilitator, because there will be people having about the same level of information [as me]. The council president will have the information. All the council members will have become informed to a certain level about budget, about deadlines, about programs and requirements, additions, all of those things.

The LSC as a Locus of Reform Activity

PA 85-1418 dictated that each LSC appoint a parent chair and secretary. Beyond that, the law did not determine how councils were to be organized or get their work done. The Thomas council adopted a few procedures that would accompany formal votes. Otherwise, at each monthly meeting it worked its way through an agenda which had been prepared in advance by the chair and principal, and meetings were marked by an easy give-and-take among council members and with the audience. In contrast to meetings at many other schools where public participation was limited to a few minutes at the end, at Thomas audience members were encouraged to comment and ask questions whenever they pleased. In fact, at times when participation ebbed, either Sanchez, Cerwinski or one of the teacher representatives would ask--even cajole--parents and teachers to ask questions, make comments and raise their concerns.

Perhaps this relaxed, participatory atmosphere accounts for the relatively large audiences

that LSC meetings typically drew during these first two years. Scheduled on the third Tuesday of every month at 6 pm in the school auditorium, it was not unusual for there to be thirty parents there--even during the cold winter months--with another dozen or more children eating the cookies and punch that Sanchez and the staff always set out for them.

The law determined much of the activity of the first council, especially during the first year of reform. Elected in mid- October, the LSC had to write By Laws and conduct a needs assessment.[19] Most importantly, it was to approve a three year School Improvement Plan and budget that the principal developed, and update these annually. Thomas was in the second round of principal evaluation, which meant that the LSC did not have to evaluate Sanchez until the following year. Even so, the amount of work and responsibility that faced this newly formed group was overwhelming. Sanchez was concerned about both the magnitude of the work, and also the capacity of a new group to do it.

> Parents are concerned. They do not have the skills, in many cases, to actually sit down, be members of the team, participate in the dialogues, and come out with meaningful ideas. . . .Reform actually caught many people unprepared. . .It was a lot at a time. . .[In any other district when] they have reform, budget is first, then curriculum, then another area. In Chicago, everything was demanded at the same time. It meant more work, more preparation for individuals. . . And you cannot become an expert of many things at the same time.

In an effort to lessen the burden on individual members, the council created a number of subcommittees on topics such as curriculum and instruction, budget, parent involvement, and physical plant improvements. Some of these were chaired by LSC members, and some were not. These committees were additional to the design teams initiated by the CANAL process a year earlier. How all of these entities would co-exist and stake out domains of work and responsibility necessarily would evolve over the next short period of time.

One substantive issue that the LSC took up that first year was that of safety, specifically gangs. The council established a uniform committee which recommended to the LSC that the school adopt uniforms. Similar to many schools in the district, and especially those serving Latino neighborhoods, the adults hoped that a school uniform might offer their youngsters some protection from being mistaken on the streets as a member of a gang. At Thomas the policy received significant support from the staff, many of whom wore the uniform (a blue blazer, white shirt, and blue dress pants or skirt) every Tuesday. Sanchez and the LSC also made sure that uniforms were provided for the children of families who could not afford them.

Teachers' Early Participation in Reform

In addition to the two teacher seats on the LSC, reform brought another mechanism through which teachers could offer their input--the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC). Unlike the LSC which had formal powers, the PPAC was advisory to the LSC on issues of curriculum and instruction. Principals were encouraged to develop their SIP "in consultation with" the PPAC, but this was not a mandate. Moreover, it was up to each school to determine all of the committee's procedures; for example, whether it was to be an elected body or a committee of the whole, terms of office, frequency of meetings, and whether meetings were open to anyone other than faculty (for example, the principal, other staff and/or parents). The PPAC proved problematic in many schools throughout the city during the early years of reform. Without a clear mission set out in the law, many never clarified their role. Others found it hard to establish good working relations with the parent dominated--and formally empowered--LSCs. Many also had difficulty determining whether the principal should or should not be part of the group.[20]

The experience at Thomas was different. Early in the fall of 1989 the faculty at Thomas

held an election for the PPAC, however, only a few teachers ran. This led to concern among members and the broader faculty that the committee was dysfunctional. The elected teachers felt isolated, the rest of the teachers felt excluded, and communication channels between representatives and their constituents were faulty. According to Lillian, ". . .people [felt] like they weren't allowed to be involved, and representatives [were] not really reporting back, or not having an opportunity to report back. . ."

Consequently, a faculty meeting was called and the PPAC was re-organized. It became a committee of the whole with meetings open to all staff--as well as the principal and parents--and held after school when anyone who wanted to could attend. Even with this change, attendance did not increase as dramatically as some proponents of participatory democracy on the faculty had hoped. About 8 to 10 "regulars" attended meetings faithfully during the first two years of reform, with the number going up when specific issues of concern to individual teachers appeared on the agenda that was posted prior to each meeting. According to Wendy, who was a reading resource teacher,

> There's also a core group of people. They're always there. In the beginning, we had people who weren't always there. They were there to see what was going on. Now it's less and less people. At first it bothered me, but it doesn't bother me any more because I feel like the people that are here are the ones that really make the difference in the school anyway.

Even though teachers' attendance at the PPAC meetings was not overwhelming, the faculty was always informed of their activities. This came about because those teachers who did attend made it a point to report to about the deliberations of the PPAC at grade level meetings, faculty meetings, union meetings--in short, at every opportunity where teachers assembled.

The re-organized PPAC decided that it was important that the chair of the PPAC be one

of the two teacher representatives on the LSC. Consequently, Wendy, who was one of the LSC teacher representatives, volunteered and was elected. The intent here was to facilitate communication between the LSC and PPAC specifically, and between parents and the teachers more generally. Consequently, virtually every council meeting at Thomas included on its agenda a report from the PPAC. Not surprisingly, PPAC meetings included a report of the LSC.

The First Budget and SIP

Budget. One of the biggest new responsibilities of reform was deciding how the school's discretionary funds were to be spent. PA 85-1418 revamped some of the finances of the district, such that over a five year period each school got control over an increasing allotment of its State Chapter One funds. At Thomas this amounted to approximately $215,000 in 1989 - 1990. As noted earlier, Sanchez included information about the budget in his initial training for the LSC. His objective was that members would become familiar with the monies coming into the school. But it was not his priority, nor that of the council chair, that the actual budget decisions be made by the LSC. Cerwinski was, in fact, ambivalent about parents' role in what was traditionally professional domain.

> It's always been my opinion that you have educators, which are the teachers, the principal, the school staff. They're professionals in the field, and they have been doing this for a great number of years. They knew best for the breakdown of funds. . .I felt it was a big thing for the council to have to decide how the money was gonna be spent, real big...I would say 99.9% of the time, [teachers] are looking for the children's best way. So it was hard to have to rush and decide and then come to a vote. `Yeah, we're gonna spend this portion here, this portion here, this portion here.' Spending the school's money is a big responsibility, and the way the central office just dumped it in our laps, and then told us we had a deadline. And here we have 11 different human beings, from 11 different corners of the world, with 11 different opinions, 11 different lives. [Ultimately] we've got to decide together how to spend this money, and we're not even talking to each other yet? It was hard. It was hard.

Consequently, while the LSC set up a budget sub-committee, it was actually the PPAC that Sanchez encouraged to take over the budgeting process. He did this by requesting that several of the school's key teacher leaders learn--along with him--how to do the annual lump sum budgeting that was now required. Sanchez' purpose in opening up the budget process to teachers was to ensure that they had the information and understanding needed to begin to make decisions for the school and independently of him. He asked Wendy and Patricia Sullivan, one of the two LSC teacher representatives and a counselor in the monolingual English program, to go with him to trainings that were scheduled by the central office and various advocacy groups the first year of reform. According to Patricia:

> When I was on the Local School Council he [Sanchez] really went out of his way to help me understand the budget. . .Any [budget] meetings down at 39th Street [Central Office] he always included me in on those meetings which, you know, he didn't have to do. . .I thought that [the trainings] really helped because then if [at a meeting the teachers said] "Well, we can do that," then I was there to tell them, "Well, no. . . You really can't do that. . ." In the first two years of school reform myself, Mrs. O'Reilley, along with Mr. Sanchez and a couple of other teachers, I think we kind of got into it and tried to help everybody understand it.

What kind of budget did the teachers write? While the process seemed to be one that invested all of the stakeholders, it did not result in a strategic document. Rather, the faculty reacted to their new discretionary money as if they were on a shopping spree, courtesy of the Board of Education. They regarded it as a novel experience that many believed might never come again. Patricia said:

> The first year we got about $215,000. We went through it like you would a shopping list kind of thing. `Alright,' someone said, `We're going to buy the science specialist and we're going to buy computers. . .What's each going to cost us?' So we went line by line almost too thoroughly down to the penny with what we could do with this money. By doing it that way we realized that if we bought this teacher we can't buy this, and people started realizing that there was a limit on

what it could request or where the money was going.

SIP. At the same time that the PPAC was developing the budget, the CANAL core planning team assumed informal responsibility for developing the SIP. This team was deemed the appropriate locus for SIP development for several reasons. First, it had been functional for more than two years. This meant that members knew how to work together and had developed social ties as well. This was a strong contrast to the LSC which both Sanchez and Cerwinski had similarly described as a new body with "eleven different perspectives, background and skills."

Second, like the LSC, it was a representative body. In contrast to the council, however, it was predominantly teachers. This was attractive to parents like Cerwinski, who, as noted earlier, was hesitant to intrude on what he considered professional turf.

Third, at the core meetings Sanchez "just comes and takes what comes. He's not as strong as he is on the council."[21] This change in status, according to one bilingual teacher, encouraged a better decision making process because it freed up both parents and teachers to contribute more.

Fourth, the core team had been extensively trained in group process and consensus decision making by CANAL. There had also been training in various communication structures such as a "pyramid" scheme. This was intended to ensure a flow of oral and written information between and across the various committees. The pyramid extended to and from constituents as well.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in a school community where the CANAL process had a longer track record than reform, the core team was widely recognized as the group whose decisions had "staying-power." According to Patricia, "its the one body that's consistent."

It seemed, however, that all of the training and structure in the world could not help the

Thomas staff avoid conflict in their first attempt to write a SIP. Their process produced a seriously flawed document as well.

One problem was a clash among work styles. Janet Reyes, a bilingual counselor, suggested:

> Some people had to see the whole thing to completion. Every step, every task had to have a person responsible before it could be considered. Other people were willing to go with an idea in a more general basis. So we kept clashing on things.

Sanchez suggested that these differences in approach were further exacerbated by a difficult format that was demanded by the Board. "The format that we were given," Sanchez suggested, "was horrible."

Another factor was the group's lack of familiarity with long term strategic planning:

> . . .In terms of strategic planning, very few people were--had ever had the opportunity to think in terms of a long term basis. In too many cases, long term planning meant: `Am I going to still be around in three years?' And when you think like that, then you become very defensive. They would say `If we're not going to have this program, then what's gonna happen with the teacher of the program?' And so people become very defensive in terms of their own job security. . .Long term planning has its advantages but it also brings peoples' guard up. What is going to happen? You have to have confidence that you're gonna be around and have resources to try to work toward your long term goals. Then you can feel more committed to the whole strategic planning process.

Most problematic was the fact that this group, like the PPAC, was intent on pleasing all of the constituents with the result that it was unable to establish a focus or clear priorities. According to Sanchez:

> The first improvement plan that we wrote, I think it was in the interest of meeting everybody else's needs. . Every time there was a need, we wrote another objective. That's bad. . .So I came into conflict with other peoples' approaches. Teachers' approaches, teachers' perceptions, teachers' assumptions, parents' perceptions. I was trying to have only very few goals. Very few objectives. But they were still ruling by majority. . .and because they didn't want to upset any constituency, they

were creating one vote for each individual constituency. [They didn't believe that] some things can be grouped under one umbrella. [For example,] if I have an objective for reading, that reading objective can easily come out under the improvement of language arts. [Similarly,] if I'm talking about staff development, I can talk about one general goal of developing teachers' skills. . .and then you know, I can prioritize in terms of different subject areas. . .But because somebody said `social studies,' we had to come out with an objective for social studies.

The core group's inability to establish priorities led them to establish even more design teams. Each was charged with researching their area and articulating their own goals, objectives, activities and plans for inclusion in the SIP. By the time all of these teams delivered their products, the process was beginning to cave in under its own participatory weight. Janet described, for example, an activity of one team that never got off the ground:

> We really tried to focus in on what we wanted to do with school-based management. . .We [wanted to develop] a leadership class for students. We were developing the student council to begin with and the idea behind the student council was we were going to have a year in which to develop units to teach about governance. Then we were going to have a mock election, and then have a real election at the beginning of the following year which would be the election of the student council members. What we did do was develop a leadership class that would be an after-school class for this year, and then do the units. That never came about because we didn't have the time to get together to develop the units.

Regardless of their extensive training in consensus decision making, the core team--at this stage at least--was not good at talking through conflicts and resolving them. Disagreements led to confrontations which further fragmented the plan. According to Sanchez:

> So we surfaced all of these little conflicts that people were seeing as a result of their own needs. But if you negate a group of people and you say `No, you cannot do it,' then you're in conflict. Okay? And then the conflict becomes, in many cases, confrontation. And they became very confrontational. Which is the difference that I see between an organization that moves forward, and organizations that fall behind. The fact that if you keep the conflict alive, you solve the conflict, you look for techniques to problem solve. If you have confrontation. . .that's a different story. . .So the SIP was put together in a long series of discussions by a team. But it was disconnected and fragmented.

Some members of the faculty concurred that the process was difficult. They complained that some of their colleagues on the core team were not representing their constituents. Patricia said,

> The one thing on the core group that I felt for awhile was I didn't feel the members really represented the school population. . .We have more than 60% of our students in the bilingual program, but on the CANAL core planning team it was almost all monolingual teachers for a while.

Patricia's individual solution to the problem that she perceived was to begin to regularly attend the core meetings. Virtually all of the teachers leaders in her group did likewise. She described one meeting to us where the group deliberated:

> Are we going to be a community academy? Are we going to focus just on science? Are we or should we not even focus on that large of a thing? That's what CANAL is asking all [of its affiliated] schools, I understand, is to have a focus.

Similarly, in her report to the LSC about a core team meeting, she described another potential focus:

> . .The core team has been focusing on how to develop students' self-esteem in a positive atmosphere. The core planning team wants Thomas to become a student-centered school. The team has been working on the SIP which needs to also have a good assessment and testing program in place in order to monitor students' progress day-by-day. I hope LSC members have read the [draft] school improvement plan and have suggestions for it.

As to her own enlightenment Patricia told us:

> For two years, if I hadn't gone to the meetings, I wouldn't have known what was going on, and there's where they decided what assessment we would use, which I found to be extremely important.

The participation of Patricia and her colleagues made all of them advocates of a broadly inclusive process. Over time this group would realize that their thinking needed to become more focused and analytic, so that they might move toward the development of strategic action plans.

In this early stage of reform, however, the opportunity to work collaboratively, and to engage in challenging intellectual work and debate was sufficient reward to press on.

Comment

First the bad news. The first budget that the PPAC developed was more akin to a shopping list than a strategic document. Likewise, the SIP was "fragmented and disconnected." Both suffered from an overdose of participatory new democracy--to the point where every individual stakeholder, committee, design team and/or group was authorized to write their own objectives, activities, plans and line items and add these to the documents. Under this process there was no possibility of settling on "a few key goals" as the principal wanted, nor creating focused and strategic plans and a budget to advance them. Consequently plans to start a student council got initiated and dropped. While various committees engaged in "thoughtful discussion" about the mission of the school (was it to be a student centered school? a community school? have a science focus?), there was no leadership from teachers to bring any of these potentially good ideas to fruition. Given the nature of Chicago's bottom-up reform, the principal also seemed reluctant to assert his will. Consequently, for a time at least, the principal's early idea of re-creating Thomas as a "really bilingual school" seemed to get pushed off the stage altogether. Ironically, consensus decision making became a mask for traditional interest group politics with everyone getting a piece of the pie. As such, it represented the kind of "maintenance politics" that Bryk et al. describe in "*A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago.*[22] The budget, in similar fashion, added to the margins of the school--for example, the purchase of computers with State Chapter I money. It did nothing to change or strengthen core programs. It exemplified the kind of school improvement activity labeled "peripheral academic change" in the

Bryk et al. report.[23]

The good news, while perhaps a bit more subtle, is significant too, especially because of its ramifications for the future development of participatory politics at the school. During the first year of reform an informal structure evolved such that three committees--the LSC, PPAC and Core Planning Team--delineated responsibility for developing the school's SIP and budget. While Sanchez formally sat on the LSC, he was only a member of the Core Planning Team, and he attended PPAC meetings at the faculty's invitation. Similarly, parents were a presence on two of the three--LSC and Core Planning. Teachers were the dominant voice on two--the PPAC and Core Planning Team. Because they communicated well with parents, however, they were highly respected and so influential on the LSC as well.

The fact that teachers at Thomas established themselves as team players with increasing influence at every level of decision making right distinguished them from their counterparts at many CPS schools. Across the city teachers who were reluctant to embrace reform and had difficulty clarifying their role in the new relations of power that it brought.[24]

Also noteworthy was the fact that the Thomas school community was enacting the broad spirit of the legislation, rather than the more narrow letter of the law. Here we refer to the language in PA 85-1418 which stipulates only that the principal develop the SIP and budget "in consultation with the LSC and PPAC." Sanchez, in keeping with his desire to "establish an equal beginning" essentially reversed these power relations when he encouraged the PPAC and core planning group to develop both documents in consultation with him.

Although the first SIP and budget were by all accounts seriously flawed, the process of creating them began to demarcate domains of influence and responsibility across the three sites of

power in ways felt appropriate to local stakeholders. Over time these would enable the school community to recover from its early mis-attempts at long-term, strategic planning, and move forward. But during the second year of reform it was the principal's evaluation that took center stage.

Principal Evaluation

The main focus of reform activity in the 1990 - 1991 school year was principal evaluation. As mentioned earlier, Sanchez came up for review that second year. Thomas benefitted somewhat from learning through the grapevine (and the press) about the trials and travails of some schools that had experienced an adversarial process the year before.[25] A few legislative directives guided the process; for example, the principal must be evaluated by both his school community and sub-district superintendent, and the LSC must make the final decision by public vote. Beyond that, a minimum of formal procedures was mandated. Training--in the form of recommendations about desirable methods--was again available to councils from advocacy groups and other entities and individuals. Sanchez told his LSC early on that it would not be appropriate for him to provide training on this topic. Thus the council--on the recommendation of its teacher representatives--turned to a nearby university and hired a professor named Harold Harmon for this purpose.[26] Additionally, the council opened up and advertised the training to other interested parents and teachers, because it desired a process that would be largely participatory.

Harmon met with this expanded group of about thirty people several times over the summer of 1990. He emphasized a few key variables that he thought were critical to a fair principal evaluation process. These included the principal's diligence in implementing the SIP, the principal's role in creating a positive school climate, and the principal's ability to promote good

relations between the school and its community.

When school opened in September the LSC formed a committee to work exclusively on principal evaluation. This was another effort to expand participation beyond the ten elected members. It would also enable the council to maintain attention to their other work. Cerwinski suggested that three LSC members sit on the committee. Otherwise, it was free from council oversight. Cerwinski explained that this process. . .

> was something that the council decided. See, we're there for the parents. Community people are there for community people, and teachers are there for the teachers. And we can just sit down at the table and make our own decision; we can sit down for an hour, two hours. But [in the case of the principal's evaluation] we're talking about a person's career, a person's life. . .Here we felt we had to get more involved, and felt that we had to get surveys. We had to question the teachers. We had to question the parents. We had to find out what they felt that the principal was doing. Our principal selection committee also involved a sixth grade student. She brought feelings of the students as well as about the principal which gave us a completely overall picture of the kind of job the principal really was doing. . .We wanted to make sure we saw everything in our final analysis. . .

The goal was to form a committee that would include five parents, two community residents, two teachers, and one upper grade student. Cerwinski refused to select the members, as was the practice in many other schools. Rather, he encouraged volunteers. Initially only three individuals came forward. Cerwinski appointed them and instructed each of them to recruit additional members. He emphasized that while the committee's work would be hard, its life span would be short. They needed to make a recommendation to the LSC by February 1st. Cerwinski also warned that the first members reach out beyond their own friends and their own opinions to form a truly representative group:

> People on this committee shouldn't just talk to their friends and get only their opinions about the principal. They will need to talk to as many people as possible regarding Mr. Sanchez.

By the end of September the principal evaluation committee was formed. Cerwinski went to their first meeting. He told them that by law the final vote was the LSC's. He assured them, however, that the council would take their recommendation very seriously. He then instructed the group to establish formal procedures by which information would be gathered and analyzed, and he admonished them to publicize those procedures. That was the last committee meeting that Cerwinski went to.

After meeting a few times the evaluation committee announced that it would hold an Open Meeting for parents in late November. It was for parents to "freely express their opinions and concerns regarding the principal." The meeting was held in the auditorium. More than seventy adults were in attendance, as were most members of the LSC. A few teachers had organized a babysitting room with punch, videos, books and games nearby. Sanchez was also there. Marta Vega, the SCR who had volunteered to serve on the evaluation committee, chaired the meeting. She set the tone for the night's work:

> A principal evaluation must take place. It is important that everyone give their opinion on this matter. According to the law, everyone at a school--teachers, parents, community residents--can give their opinion regarding their principal. This committee needs to hear your opinions. Later on this committee will gather opinions from the teachers and other school staff. . .Everyone at Thomas has the right to give their opinion about the principal.[27]

Marta went on to tell the audience that the evaluation would focus on several issues critical to principal's leadership. These were the principal's support of parent and community leadership, educational leadership, and management.

At first, parents were hesitant to say much, and so Marta reminded them that it was "their" meeting. Any comment would be welcome, she said, and the committee could not make a

recommendation without their input. Eventually a father said:

> My son was once in the bilingual program, and he is now in the regular program. This is because of the motivation from the principal and motivation from the teachers. Mr. Sanchez often greets the children as they arrive to school. If the children arrive late, he tells them that they need to arrive on time. [translation]

Two other parents acknowledged that Sanchez was a "hands-on" principal, walking the school's halls, visiting classrooms, and greeting children in the morning and at the end of the school day, both in the playground and outside on the street.

With these few comments the audience fell silent. But members of the committee were not satisfied. An LSC member, who was sitting at the front table with the committee, admonished the audience to speak up. "Three people cannot speak for 700 parents. That's not how you do a principal evaluation. Why don't parents want to volunteer their opinions?" [translation]

A teacher on the committee reinforced this comment: "We cannot force people to give their opinions, just as teachers cannot force children to respond in class."

A parent sitting toward the back of the auditorium countered: "If someone doesn't give an opinion, maybe it is because they are in agreement with what is being said."

At this juncture someone suggested that parents were reluctant to talk about Sanchez when he was in the room. He left immediately, encouraging his parents to speak freely as he walked out. A few more comments were forthcoming:

> My son tells me that he wants to be a principal just like Mr. Sanchez. Someone who gets to work early. My son says he wants to be a teacher just like Mr. Sanchez and help children who don't know how to read. [translation]

A mother added:

> I am very happy. I once had children here at Thomas schools 6 years ago, but then my family moved back to Mexico. We have now moved back and my children are

> once again at Thomas School. There have been many changes at this school since that time. For one, this is the first time that the school has a bilingual principal. [translation]

Despite these positive comments, a father in the audience wondered if some of the parents who were absent from the meeting might hold a different opinion regarding Sanchez:

> There are only 100 parents here for this meeting. I am concerned about the other parents who are not here. Perhaps the parents who are at this meeting all support the principal. . .I think a survey should be sent out to them.

But a teacher on the committee quickly rejected this idea:

> It is the parents' responsibility to find out about council meetings. If I cannot go to a meeting, I call up my representative and tell them how I feel. If those representatives don't pay attention to me, then I may not vote for them the next time around. . .Even if you can't go to LSC meetings, you can still find out what has happened at these meetings.

The meeting ended shortly thereafter when no one had anything more to say. Every comment had been positive.

Next, the council invited the sub-district superintendent, Mrs. Margarita Acosta, to their December meeting. By law, she was obligated to conduct her own principal's evaluation, and at a closed meeting of the council, offer her recommendation. Acosta broke with protocol, however, and gave her comments in the context of the public meeting.[28]

> In instruction, I gave him high marks. He seems to administer the school fairly, and there are no problems with discipline. There appear to be good feelings of school pride, and people appreciate those feelings. The building is well-maintained, and there is a good lunch room. The school is safe, and children do not appear to be fearful. I have given Mr. Sanchez the highest score of 5 in all these areas.

After her report an LSC member asked Acosta to explain the criteria that she had used in her evaluation. She reported that she examined the school's test scores and other documentation, and

that she had an extended conversation with Sanchez regarding his performance. In reaction to her comments a mother in the audience remarked,

> Your report is a good evaluation. I agree with you that the principal is friendly and says hello to everyone, and that everything at the school appears to be in order. I think he is much better than other principals we have had in the past. [translation]

In early January the committee interviewed Sanchez. In addition, they developed a staff questionnaire and analyzed returns from more than 80% of the staff. A few weeks later the committee submitted its formal report to the LSC. This was discussed in closed session and a public meeting was scheduled for the following week. The LSC would take its public vote at that time.

Cerwinski opened the special meeting of the LSC. He told the audience of more than one hundred teachers and parents:

> Tonight the council must make a decision regarding Mr. Sanchez's contract. The principal evaluation team has spent many hours on this. It has taken a lot of time and hard work. I want to express my appreciation for all that the evaluation committee has done. I hope the decision that we make tonight is one that the parents and teachers also want.

Moments later the LSC voted to offer Mr. Sanchez a four-year contract. There was one dissenting vote, from a parent member who had recently been appointed to fill a vacancy.

Sanchez appeared deeply moved by the vote. He thanked the committee for its hard work and the council "for the vote of confidence." He added, "I promise to work hard to fulfill all of my duties." Cheers came from the audience and the meeting was adjourned. Two months later, at an LSC meeting, Sanchez executed his four year performance contract. A small reception, hosted by the faculty, followed the signing.

Comment

Clearly, the principal's evaluation had been a successful one at Thomas, not just because Sanchez received a contract, but because of the broad participation and positive feelings that the process engendered. Cerwinski had orchestrated the process with a minimum of attention to himself, relying instead on the effort and leadership skills of the committee. In retrospect he told us:

> I pay high compliments to our principal selection committee, because the job they did eased the burden [from me] tremendously. I felt that a fair decision was rendered.

Cerwinski was not disappointed by the fact that the vote was not unanimous. Rather, as chair he suggested that it was his job to uphold the right of the minority to disagree with the majority:

> We even had a newly-elected parent that opposed the vote, and I talked to her prior [to the vote]. There was a little dislike between that particular member and the principal, and it has to do, I feel, with personality. But she has some very legitimate things that she knows. . .And there were some other situations where she didn't like the way he [Sanchez] handled some things in the past with some other parents. . .And so I told her, I said, `Look. You're here because we elected you in here, the council. . .Your vote is gonna be for the parents of the community. I urge that you vote the way you feel they want you to. Now if you feel you have parents that want your vote opposed, don't worry about what anyone else says. You give your vote.' She happened to have been in touch with a few people. . .[and based on that] it was her duty to oppose. So she opposed. That's good. She stood her ground.

Cerwinski's comments are all the more interesting in light of the behavior of some other LSC chairs. There were rumors all over town that some chairs, in their eagerness to forge school unity and cohesiveness, had pressured dissenters to vote with the majority. In contrast, Cerwinski was steadfast to a higher principle; to uphold the right of the minority as a critical function of a

fledgling democracy. The Thomas school community was proud of the democratic process that it had successfully engaged.

The Locus of Reform Activity Shifts

The signing of Sanchez' first contract in February, 1991 marked a turning point for the LSC and a shifting of reform activity at the school. LSC members acted as if their responsibilities were finished. That spring, for example, Cerwinski could be found more often coaching a neighborhood little league baseball game than at an LSC meeting. Members' attendance at meetings also dropped precipitously. A few just disappeared. Three others left at the end of the school year, one because her daughter graduated, and two more because they transferred their children to the new magnet school that had just opened in the sub-district.[29] The departure of these women--whom Sanchez referred to as "duenas" because of their maturity and experience--represented a significant loss, not only to the council but also to the school community. It signaled a growing exodus of some of the more sophisticated parents on the council. Their interest in governance, and knowledge of school and community politics would not easily be replaced.[30]

Late in the school year a few meetings had to be canceled due to lack of a quorum. Other meetings were held "for informational purposes only" since there were not enough members present to take any votes. Without an active membership to recruit replacements, and no one from the community stepping forward to volunteer, several seats remained vacant.

Given these changes it was not surprising that the second LSC elections, held in October 1991, contrasted sharply with the first. Few parent or community candidates nominated

themselves and NTW did not run a slate. Sanchez and several teachers put some effort into getting out the vote and encouraging parents to run, but their approach was different this time. They did not go door to door or ask the priests if they could address Sunday mass. Rather they asked some of the parent volunteers who were already in the building on a daily basis to run for the six parent seats. For example, Lydia Amaya and Laura Ramirez were urged to run. They had been volunteering for years. Initially they came because they wanted "to be close to their kids" and "see what was happening" and "help the teachers if they could." Now they were giving their time not only to their own children's teachers but to anyone on the staff who needed help. When Sanchez said to them, "Well, you're here anyway so why not run?" they both nominated themselves and ran uncontested. Filling the two community seats presented more of a problem. In fact, these seats remained vacant for the majority of the next several years.

In sum, parent and community involvement in governance had ebbed and flowed two years after the passage of reform. Some members seemed to have grown weary from all of the responsibility and activity of the first two years, while others had moved out of the attendance area. The new recruits, like the first, were longtime volunteers at the school. Prior to joining the LSC, however, the interest of the former group was being involved with their children's classroom experience, while the focus of the latter was the broader politics of the school.

These changes, while significant, did not end parent involvement. Rather, in 1991 the purpose and locus of parent involvement shifted--from governance via the LSC in the first years, to parent education and a new parent center in the second. The parent center was Sanchez' brainchild. Even though the school was still somewhat over-crowded, he convinced the staff to clean and refurbish a small room in the basement as a place where parents might congregate. LSC

meetings, smaller now because there were so few active members, also moved to this room. They were re-scheduled to 10:00 am on Tuesdays too, since most of the LSC members were already in the building anyway, and the size of the audience had dwindled significantly.

In addition to finding the space, Sanchez suggested to the PPAC that the school use some of its CANAL funds to create a professional position of parent coordinator. He recommended Janet for this new role. In addition to being a bilingual counselor, over the past two years she had been a member of the core planning team, the principal evaluation committee, and chair of the parent involvement design team. In all three she functioned informally as a parent liaison--translating for parents, and oftentimes helping them to prepare in advance of meetings so that they might be comfortable taking an active role. For example, to ready parents for their interview with Sanchez when he was evaluated the year before, she recounted:

> We practiced [before meeting with him]. They had to read their part and they had to practice. So I gave them things like, `Well, what if somebody [on the evaluation committee] asks a question and you don't know the answer? How would you respond?' They were pretty nervous, but they did very well. They were really pleased with what they did. We also videotaped the interview. We did that not so much to get the principal's responses, but because I thought it was important for those parents to see how well they did presenting.

One drawback to Janet's new assignment was the fact that some teachers thought that she was "too North American in her outlook." For example, Carol, a fifth grade bilingual teacher, was concerned that under Janet's guidance the parent center would appeal most to parents who wanted to assimilate quickly into North American culture rather than retain their own. Carol's prediction was borne out as it was a group of young mothers newly arrived from Mexico who became most active in the center. They asked for workshops on topics such as sewing, computer literacy and obtaining a General Education Diploma. Their needs came to define the Center's

program.

Comment

The shift at Thomas from parents' involvement in governance--when reform and LSCs were a novelty--to parent education and support was not atypical in the CPS at this time. During the third year of reform many of the first LSC members across the city decided not to run for re-election because of their own mobility, or the fact that the demands and responsibilities of the unpaid job were too great. Similarly, it was not unusual for those professional educators that were interested in parent involvement to shift their focus from training parents for a governance role, to parent support and education.

What was unusual at Thomas, however, was the role that teachers were poised to take during what we will call the next "era" of reform. As noted earlier, by virtue of CANAL teachers had several years of experience in site based management. Additionally, through their involvement with the teachers' union and several universities, a core group was familiar with "best practices" in a number of curricular areas. They had also been introduced to issues of restructuring, such as portfolio assessment, evaluation and strategic planning. Perhaps most important, this group was learning that school change was not a quick fix. And so, unlike some of the parents who were leaving for greener pastures, the teachers felt ownership of Thomas. They dug in and dedicated themselves to improving their school.

The Era of Teacher Empowerment: 1991 - 1993

An Inclusive Process for Developing the SIP and Budget

As noted earlier, Thomas' first budget was not much more than a laundry list. Teachers

knew that they had $215,000 to spend, and they put price tags on all of the things that they wanted until the money was gone. Similarly, the SIP was written to satisfy the needs of individuals and interest groups, rather than evaluate and strategically plan for improvements in the core functioning of the school. Moreover, the first budget and SIP were developed somewhat separately. The core planning team was responsible for the budget and the PPAC for the SIP. While there was a group of teachers on both committees that overlapped, and significant reporting back and forth, no one suggested that the first budget was written to serve the SIP or that the two were otherwise intertwined. The result was a lot of unfocused academic initiatives.

By 1991 the process for developing both documents was beginning to change as the reform process matured at Thomas School and as key teachers developed their own skills to work collaboratively, exert leadership over the process, and draw in parents in meaningful ways. The core planning team still assumed major responsibility for the budget, while the PPAC wrote the SIP, and the LSC approved both. But after two years of experience with reform, the documents were being developed in tandem and responsibility for drafting them was shared. How did this come about?

For one thing, the principal and several teachers continued to go to in-services and workshops offered by the central office and advocacy groups. Most importantly, they took information back to the school so that they would not have to assume sole responsibility for getting this work done. Patricia told us:

> I would say in the last over four years now the majority of the people really understand what the budget is all about. I think people still get confused, like, you'll hear teachers say, `Well, can't we buy that out of State Chapter I?' which nobody would have said five years ago, myself included. . .[Before we would have just said], `We can't have that.' Now people say, `Well, wait a minute if we want

to do that, maybe we could [spend money from a different category] and still do it.'

Patricia suggested too that the attempt to please all constituents, which had been the modus operandi during the first year of reform, was replaced by a process that showed the first evidence of strategic thinking about difficult program and personnel issues.

> Well, now everybody knows what the budget is. It's general information. Years ago, you wouldn't know how much money the principal got for deseg. [desegregation money]. That was confidential. You know, he had to treat it like that. . .I think in some ways we have [moved toward] a democracy. . . Mostly now, with regard to budget and those types of things, I think we're really democratic and far more advanced than a lot of schools. Most of the money that is spent, discretionary funds and things like that, we had a say. . .The first year we tried to placate everybody to some extent. The following year we took a careful look at some of those things and even though some people's feelings were hurt a little bit, teachers began to say, `I don't think we really need this,' or they would ask, `Do we really need a freed assistant?' So when we rewrote the budget the second year we didn't keep everything that we had requested the first year.[31]

Similarly, when we asked Patricia's colleagues, Lillian and Carol, about how the budgeting and SIP process changed as reform took root, they suggested that relations of power with the principal changed, knowledge developed and was better utilized, and their collaborative process deepened. Lillian, for example, discussed the new leadership roles and relations of power under reform:

> The way I see it [with reform], we have new roles, and roles that involve a lot more than just relating to our children. Our roles now call for us to relate to administration in different ways, and to relate to each other in different ways. . .In the past, our leadership was in the classroom with our children. We didn't really decide issues of curricula or budget. We just got big pieces of paper from time to time that told us that we were going to teach. Basically, as far as the materials we might choose to teach those things, or what hours of the day we would teach them, there was no leadership--no decision making--that involved teachers. It was just a matter of being able to conform to the structure that we were given. Now, there's a different demand in terms of being able to talk to the principal about curricula and about all areas of budget, which we weren't concerned with before.

> If you had a program you weren't concerned with your program's budget--that kind of thing. Now you have to work at a school-wide budget, because it's going to make a difference in whether your program will be funded. Reform calls for a rearrangement of relationships. And to a large extent that's happened.

Kathy discussed how teachers took bits and pieces of what they had learned from different places--for example, the central office's training in Roberts Rules of Order, and site based decision making from CANAL--and melded them into a collaborative process that was unique to and functional for their school:

> [We use] Robert's Rules of Order [at meetings] I believe. That's what all of the training groups suggested. But we come to recommendations through brainstorming and consensus a lot of times, so Robert's Rules is only a piece of it. Isn't that interesting? You can say you can do this through Robert's Rules of Order and majority vote, but actually it's a combination, a collaboration. Actually, the way it works, [the process for developing the SIP and budget is] core planning team to PPAC to LSC. That is really the route--the way it goes. That's how decisions get made.

Kathy suggests too that during the 1992 - 1993 school year the decision making process was still in formation:

> In the coming year we will probably have to do more work on bringing all three together--the LSC, PPAC, and core planning team. I would say the core planning team is much more influential here than the PPAC. For example, we are just changing some policies on grading. It was an issue that came up during one of the last LSC meetings. . .Parental concerns were that we don't all seem to be grading the same. . .and the LSC suggested that the PPAC review this. But instead of PPAC, teachers decided the core planning team should do it. We have already worked out some things. But it is tentative, because what we say is not the law. It will go from core planning to PPAC. PPAC will then review it and make revisions. Then it will go to the LSC for approval, and if they say it's OK, then it will become policy.

In 1992 teachers also talked with us for the first time about using data to inform SIP development and decision making more generally. The issue under discussion was whether or not children were being transitioned from the bilingual program to the monolingual one appropriately.

Several teachers had asked faculty members of a local university to look at students' scores on the Iowas Test of Basic Skills and *la Prueba*. They scheduled an after school meeting to get help understanding how to analyze their data and make better decisions about transitioning. Of this effort Patricia said:

> I know that people who do research like this, you have to have some sort of understanding for statistics and numbers and things like that and I don't. My mind doesn't work that way, but I could tell you about Thomas School and a lot about what I think the problems are. Then I would like somebody to take the data and see if it supports our hunches. . This was [the teachers'] idea. We really wanted to take some of the stuff that we've been talking about and really get some hard core statistics to back up what we've said, whether it be that our kids stay too long in the bilingual program, or not. . .[Maybe the bilingual program stays big] because of mobility; we have such a large turnover of kids. Let's just find out what it is instead of guessing. Let's get some statistics or some data to back up what we think to be our problem. Then we could even make some changes, make some adjustments or whatever.

While it would be another year before Thomas would move on this problem of transitioning as part of their school improvement planning process, this was the first evidence that we saw of a desire to collect good information and use it for program evaluation and planning.

Extending Ties to Parents

A somewhat more successful effort during the third and fourth years of reform was involving parents in the SIP and budgeting processes. As noted earlier, at Thomas parents were represented on the core planning team. Their presence here was not surprising, given that Project CANAL had emphasized their involvement on this committee a year before the passage of reform. What was unusual, however, was teachers' insistence at Thomas that parents attend their PPAC meetings as well and take an active role in both. Teachers like Patricia, Carol, Lillian, Kathy and Janet had gotten to know several of the parent members of the second LSC from their prior

involvement as volunteers in the building. Lydia, for example, had been a teachers' aide prior to becoming chair of the second LSC. Her experience in Kathy's first grade classroom made her feel welcome in the building and respectful of professional's work with the children:

> Oh, Mrs. Porter made me feel welcome since my daughter started school. We were in there for workshops and it was fascinating to know how, just opening up a book and reading to your kid may not be enough for the kid. It's like turning the page and asking the child, `Well, what do you think is gonna happen next to the bear?' You're getting feedback from the child. They're more interested in the book than just saying, `Okay, now, let's flip the page,' and you just go on reading, you know. She motivates them. She's the one that does whole language. [translation]

Similarly, Gloria Garcia, another parent LSC representative on the second council, was critical of LSC members at other schools who were suspicious of teachers. Like Lydia, she knew that teachers wanted to help the children learn. Because of this, she was anxious to support the professional staff in any way that she could:

> I hate hearing [on the news] about those schools where LSC members are going around planning to spy [on teachers].[32] That's not right. If I know, for example, that you are the teacher and that I am a parent and that you already have your [instructional] program, then I am going to stick to whatever you say because you are the teacher. As a parent, well I am going to help with what you want to do. Help you, not change things. Also, I need to help you in a way so that you feel comfortable working with me. So you feel that you are supported. . .that I support you as a mother and that I am in agreement with the way you are working. For example, if you start something, then you tell me, `Look, [help me by] doing it this way, not that way.' And, if that's how you talk to me, I am going to do my best to follow along. [translation]

Gloria felt that this kind of support and partnership would, in the long term, be beneficial to her child:

> A lot of our kids have problems with reading. But the parents help out a lot in preschool and kindergarten classes, and at home, because the teachers have showed them how. If they say, `Mommy how do you do this? How do you write this?' Well the moms that know how to write can show them. And why can't more teachers just say in a simple way to the parents, `Look at this, do this and do this.

> And you will see that your child improves.' Teachers need to talk to parents in a simple way because parents don't want formality, and they don't want to complicate things, they like the simple things. So teach them in a simple way, without formality. Some mothers really want that kind of help. And if you're a teacher, why not help them? I know it is impossible for a teacher to attend to eighteen kids, twenty kids, twenty-two kids. I know that it is hard. But if one learns at home how to help, with whatever the children's problems are. . . then the children really do progress. It's a lot of work to help parents, and maybe it seems like it isn't worth it, but some teachers here know that it really is a help to the teacher. [translation]

As noted earlier, parents like Gloria and Lydia ran for the LSC at Sanchez' request. Consequently, it was not surprising, given their previous involvement with the school, that most did not show a strong desire to get involved in governance issues once they were elected--beyond the obligations of coming to monthly meetings, and signing off on documents that needed their approval. Rather, it was the teachers most active in decision making bodies of the school, and also Marta, the SCR, who wanted parents to be active participants. They encouraged this for two reasons. First, it was good politics. Carol, for example, knew that parents were more likely to agree with a recommendation and/or decision that came out of core planning or PPAC if parents were engaged in the negotiations "right from the start:"

> It's really important that the chairperson of the LSC know what all this is about. When they know what's going on, well that's helpful. It's more like a democracy, because they were in on those meetings, where you know, we all brainstormed, saying `Well, what about this? What about that? No, we don't need that because we have this.' [If they're part of the initial discussions, then] when they come back to approve a budget, they have a little more insight.

When asked for a concrete example, she said:

> The PPAC is primarily a teacher's committee. But it would be nice if, in the future, some of the parents and local school council members came to the PPAC meetings. So far, we haven't really had too much of a disagreement. They can see where our recommendations came from. But sometimes, it's better when they hear the conversation right from the start. . .Certain things that they may not even be

aware of. Then they could ask, `Why are you spending all this money for desks, or whatever?' And, the teacher could say, ` Well, I only have ten big desks, and the big kids are sitting in primary desks.' You know, [if you had a conversation like that], there would be more understanding. So, maybe a suggestion for the future, would be if parents wanted to come - unless it's something where the teachers wanted a closed meeting. Actually, I think for any meeting we've ever had, it would have been nice if the parents were there.

She also knew what was likely to happen if parents felt that decisions were made without them:

> When you make a mistake, and don't include people, well, then I guess you learn to become a little more astute as to how things will work out. Badly, in other words. [You learn that there are] certain issues and you're going to have to bring parents in first and make them feel like they're a part of what's going on. Like they are in on this. [If you do that], then it will go. If you don't do that, it won't.

Consequently, Carol made sure that parents attended the special, half-day meetings of the core team where decisions got hammered out:

> Eventually we were pretty much able to work through the different problems. [For example], a couple of times we had half-day in-services, and we really tried to figure out with everybody a way we could communicate [to parents] the ideas [we were discussing]. It all depends on which side of the fence you're sitting on. Because if you're on the core team then you legitimately felt that everybody knew what was going on. We weren't deliberately trying to isolate anybody. We felt that we were communicating. But then we'd sit in on this other meeting, and parents would be like, `What?' They didn't know--they knew nothing. They hadn't been to the core meetings and just didn't understand what was going on.

Teachers had a second, and perhaps more important, reason for involving parents as well. They believed that their decision making would be stronger if they understood parents' needs, experiences and concerns. The best example here took place in 1993, when the SIP and budget were being debated. In PPAC meetings a substantial group of teachers decided to use part of the State Chapter 1 allotment to hire a music and art teacher. They thought this would enhance children's educational experience. But to their surprise, when they presented this idea to the LSC,

parent members opposed it. Again, Carol tells us,

> Parents took a totally different position then we [teachers] did. When we discussed [the money] we really felt we needed a fine arts and music teacher. Then all of the kids would be serviced and they would have more variety in their classes. They rarely had music and so we talked about it with the LSC and expected parents to like the idea. But they didn't. They wanted to hire another social worker. When the teachers heard that, they said, `Oh, we don't need a social worker!' But, then, when we really listened. . .we got the other side of the coin and heard from the parents, and you know, we changed our mind. They know things that are going on in the community that the teachers are not aware of . . .Like last spring several students were shot and a few killed at the high school we feed into. Now, when that happens, you know the children need counseling. They need counseling. Parents knew it, but we didn't. So, with parents at the meetings, we had the other side of the coin--their perspective. . . Maybe a social worker position wouldn't have been in the next budget, if we only viewed it as teachers--and not from the community's perspective. So, you need to see things to really be effective.

Gloria acknowledged that getting parents to the meetings was not that difficult. Getting them to assert themselves once they were there, however, proved to be a hurdle for some immigrant parents who were not yet comfortable with participatory government. She recounted one of her own experiences talking to a neighbor who was somewhat cynical about her school involvement:

> I said to myself, `This is my decision.'. . .She said, `Why is it your decision? Who gives you the right?" And what I said to myself then, very clearly, was that we are not in Mexico. We are here in the United States, and here you are free to have your own opinion and decide what to do. [translation]

Perhaps the person most responsible for bringing parents to the table was Marta. She, like Gloria, thought that it was not enough for parents to attend meetings. They also had to be comfortable in the presence of professionals and even other parents who they might not know, and willing to speak their minds. She suggested that even though the population at Thomas was 100% Latino, families came from different places, and so needed to learn to communicate among

themselves, as well as with professionals:

> We have parents from Mexico, from Chicago, we've got parents from Texas and we all come together and they sometimes have conversations, `Senorita Vega,' they say to me, ` this is the way we do it in Mexico, no?' I say, `Oh yes, that's right.' Then the other one will come and say, `This is the way it's done in Texas.' `Oh that's right,' I'll say, `that's the way we do it in Texas." So they don't know where I come from. Some think that I'm from Mexico, some think that I was born here. . .It doesn't matter where I'm from, I want the school and the parents to be able to talk to each other. Maybe that's why my job is. I'm supposed to be a teachers' aide, but I'm more a community advocate. I'm trying to reach the parents as much as I reach the teachers. My job is to see that they get along. Before I encourage anything. . . I have to weigh it--think it over. I need to think about how it's going to be. Just so it won't. . .My thing is, there should be good relations between teachers and parents, because if there isn't, then the bad reaction will hurt the kids.

Marta thought too that with sufficient training, parents would have more to offer the school. She thought that facilitating this was another important aspect of her job:

> Parents don't have much real input. I think mainly it's because they feel like they don't have the training, they don't have the ability . . .Although they sit at the CANAL training, they still don't feel comfortable coming forward with their ideas. . .We still need a lot more training programs. I would like to see parents participate in forming this school improvement plan. But how can we get them to be involved in that? Now at school we have these design teams that are working on different sections of the plan. And my idea would be to involve them there. Even if they were there just to learn something. Just to sit and listen. And if they felt that they could offer something, then they are right there where they can do it. But by not inviting them, by not having them there, when are they going to see how it's done, at least? They have to be there to be able to say, `Well. . .That sounds good. That doesn't sound good.' . . .I think the design teams are the place where parents would have a lot to offer. Say discipline, there is a team that works on discipline. There is a team that works on parent involvement. There is, even, [a team that works on] the curriculum. Because you know [if parents came] they would be able to say, `Well, I don't think it will go over, I don't think this book is what our children should be reading.' It's not that they're going to take over, but they can at least suggest some things. And how it's done, they might be able to do more over time, but at the beginning, there should be places for them to start.

Marta found close allies in several of the teachers cited above. Sanchez, of course, was

also supportive of parent involvement. The activities that these staff members were encouraging gave life to some of the notions of community education that he had espoused when he first became principal. In fact, when we asked Lillian about Sanchez' involvement in the parent education activities that were going on during this period, she answered wryly:

> I think he's very good at deciding what he wants. He plants seeds in various places so those thoughts become the thoughts of others. That's a strong kind of leadership, isn't it? He's confident of his leadership in that form.

Content of the SIP

In *A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago* Bryk et al. suggest that a strategic SIP--ones that "adopt a school specific view of what we need to improve. . .rather than just adopting readily available, popular, or add-on programs" is one hallmark of a stage of school improvement called "emergent restructuring."[33] A budget that supports such a focused plan provides further evidence of this stage of development. Knowing this, what can we say about the content of the SIP in 1994? Was it a strategic document that charted a focused course for the school? Did it align with the budget?

Interestingly, while the school community had put great effort into developing a deliberative and collaborative process, their process did not yield a plan or budget that was significantly different or better than the first ones that they had written at the start of reform. We asked key teachers to comment on the content of the SIP for us, and they too were critical. But in 1993 they no longer analyzed the weakness as a political problem--the need to placate all constituents. Rather, they attributed its faults to a lack of focus, which, in turn, impeded strategic planning. Further, they saw this as a developmental issue--a stage they needed to get through.

Kathy said:

> My hope for the future is to continue doing staff development. I think if we do, we will become much more programmatic and focused. Also, we need to work on a [local] assessment system--that should be the anchor of any program that we do.

Similarly, Patricia said:

> I would say, truthfully, we have a good school. I mean, I've worked in other schools, and I think Thomas is a good school. We have cooperative parents; we have kids that are nice, you know, just a good school population; they want to learn. It isn't always easy for all of them, given all the other things in their own lives that they deal with. We have materials; we have the books we need. We have dozens and dozens of dedicated teachers, so I think we're doing good things, I really do. But, I think somehow we need to have probably a little more . . getting everybody working towards the same end goal. Everybody's working, but just in different play books. So, we kind of need to bring all this energy together [in the SIP].

Later in the same interview she expanded on these ideas:

> I mean, let's face it. We've had in-services on whole language, cooperative learning, portfolio assessment, integrated science and math. . .I mean whatever's new, we were in on it. But now we need to decide for ourselves what we're going to concentrate on.

Patricia was also able to contemplate a solution path:

> Lately I guess we've realized that we don't need to do a million activities. You know, the first year with CANAL [1989], everybody thought, `Your design team had to do 20 things better than [the other teams]. . .' It was a competitive thing. But now [1993] people have come to realize that if your design team sponsored or organized one or two things a year, that's good. Instead of all these silly things that really don't have any meat and potatoes. Now each group will try to take responsibility for two or three things that are really good, functional things for the school, and do it well, and then that's it. . .And its not enough to just think about your own program. We need more continuity from grade to grade, from teacher to teacher. We need more consistency along these lines, more discussion among us about instruction: `How do you do this? When do you teach this? And what do you think. . .' so that by the time all the kids from second grade get to third grade they have the same foundation. You know, they've been exposed to the same things. Right now we don't have that.

A Common Mission and Changing Relations of Power

We cannot leave the "era of teacher empowerment" without a comment about teachers' evolving relationship with Sanchez. As noted earlier, in 1989 his desire for teachers and parents to become equal partners with him intimidated some of his staff and piqued the curiosity of others. Over time, however, he told us that he had learned to "tone it down." Similarly, teachers like Lillian suggested that he developed a much more subtle style of leadership--"plant[ing] seeds in various places." This, she told us, was a euphemism for sharing ideas with key teacher leaders. According to these same teachers, Sanchez would then support those individuals whose activities advanced his agenda, and ignore others. This approach did three things. It exacerbated teachers' feelings that there were two faculty groups--one that was "in" his favor and one that was "out." It also enabled him to recede to the background without relinquishing any real control. Most important, it facilitated progress toward his goal of teacher empowerment--at least with regard to the "in" group. During this period Sanchez was not seen by his faculty as leading change, but rather as enabling it. Consequently, he managed to encourage select teachers' continued activism, knowledge and leadership development. But a nagging question remains: To what extent did teachers feel that they functioned on an "equal footing" with him?

In fact, none of the activist teachers suggested that there was real equality between themselves and the principal.[34] In 1993, as in 1989, the differences in their formal roles was paramount. Sanchez their supervisor. Moreover, as principal "he was accountable overall, above everyone else." Consequently, teachers like Patricia and Carol continued to take great pains to "handle him," even as they took increasingly leadership for the school, and in fact, became

spokespeople for it. Thomas, for example, was often touted as a model school by Project CANAL because of its embrace of site based management, and Sanchez was often asked to present at citywide meetings of CANAL. He would sometimes take Patricia with him, or send her on her own if he had more pressing responsibilities. By this time too Sanchez was regarded as a senior principal in the district, because he had more than three years in the job.[35] He was often asked to talk--or send a representative to talk--about activities at Thomas with other principals and faculties. Patricia often went to these meetings as well. She said, however, that his trust in her did not emanate from a collaboration of equals. Rather, from working closely with her for several years, he was confident that "[she] was not going to do anything to embarrass him or the school." Similarly, Carol told us:

> I think he and I have a very good relationship. I think he's approachable if you're on his good side, and I'm on his good side. So I can criticize quite a bit, but I am on his good side. I don't know what it would be like if I were on his bad side. I hear it's pretty bad. So I'm very careful with him.

It would be misleading to suggest, however, that the heart of the relationship between Sanchez and his faculty was teachers' caution. In addition to the deference accorded to his formal role, teacher leaders at Thomas respected their principal because they all shared a common aim--to do what is best for the children. Patricia equates this mission with professionalism and a lack of selfishness:

> I think what makes Thomas a nice place to be is that a majority of the teachers are really not selfish. . .There's a lot of people here--I won't say everybody--but there's enough teachers who are real dedicated, true teachers. . .You have to be honest. That goes to being a professional. You have to want to be there for the kids--honestly--and then the decisions that you make won't be selfish.

Because Sanchez shares her sentiment, they are able to work well together:

> He's been very supportive of teachers becoming very involved in school reform to a point. That point is whether they want to serve the children here. . .He has to believe that what you do is going to be best for the school. If he does, you've got the green light.

Lillian echoes this analysis:

> Sometimes teachers come into meetings and they say to him in a hostile tone, `Well, we can discuss this, and we can change that.' I get tired of some teachers taking an aggressive attitude about what they want to do. A much better way to convince him is if we're united and strong enough, and behave as professionals and people who actually treasure kids' lives every day. Because that's how he behaves. Then if we want to implement things that we feel strongly enough about--and that will serve the children--then all we need to do is make sure that he understands why and how strongly we feel. If it focuses on children then it doesn't have to be negative.

Comment

We have called the years between 1991 and 1993 the era of teachers' empowerment because teachers became were the most active decision making group at the school. While the second LSC met during this period, its parent members did not have the same interest in decision making, nor the background experience or political sophistication of the first council. Women like Lydia and Gloria attended meetings of core planning and PPAC when teachers asked, but beyond their request for a social worker, there is little evidence that they asserted themselves once there. In spite of the best efforts of several teachers and the SCR to prepare them for an active role, parents remained a helpful and committed, but largely deferent group.

Perhaps the best way to understand teachers' development and also the evolution of school improvement activities during this "second" era of reform is to suggest that both were progressing along a trajectory. Teachers' development began in the years prior to reform as they became involved in various continuing education and CTU activities, and university partnerships.

It picked up speed in 1989, the year Project CANAL came into the building. By 1993 teachers had been working diligently--and collaboratively--for years on issues of best practices, school restructuring, parent involvement, etc. Thus, the inclusive process that they developed for writing the SIP and budget was one that they respected. It did not result in documents that were significantly better than their first efforts, however.

The experience at Thomas suggests that the road to strategic action in schools--the ability to think about the school as an organization and to collect and use good information for evaluation and planning--is a long one. It demonstrates too that a democratic decision making process, one that Patricia described as "much more advanced" than that found in many similar schools was necessary but insufficient. To reach their dual aims of participatory democracy and strategic action, the faculty specifically, and the school community more generally, still had a long way to go.

Strong Democracy and Emergent Restructuring:

Public Debate and Planning about a Private Issue

As noted earlier, four "types" of local school politics, and also four "types" of school improvement efforts were identified by Bryk et al. In their assessment of Chicago's reform.[36] We have already referred to two of these types--maintenance politics and unfocused or peripheral academic change initiatives--to describe the early stages of reform at Thomas. In this next discussion we make use of two more of these categories--the politics of "strong democracy" and the school improvement activity labeled "emergent restructuring"--to frame our discussion of events that occurred at Thomas during the last year of our observation--the 1993 - 1994 school

year.

Bryk et al. argue that in a school characterized as a strong democracy, there is dissatisfaction with existing school operations and sustained conversations about change and improvement. The life force of such politics is public discussion and debate about big ideas--for example, the guiding principles and mission of the school, and the specific improvement efforts that must be implemented to achieve such aims. Public discussion necessitates dialogue across at least two 'sites of power"--the principal and faculty, principal and parents, or parents and faculty.[37] Moreover, participants in the debate must have developed social ties that will sustain their dialogue even if the issues under discussion become contentious. They also need a collaborative process that will enable them to work together for the long haul. The authors identify principal initiative as one route to strong democracy. Another, teacher initiative, occurs when teachers plan the changes that they want, and then organize to implement them.

The case study of Thomas so far has documented strong social capital--trust among all three sites of power, norms of volunteerism among parents and teachers, and also a highly developed, collaborative process for making decisions. There is also ample evidence, by 1993, that the school community can sustain discussion and debate in meetings of the core planning team, PPAC and LSC, and reach consensual decisions about school improvement activities. The label that we selected for the years 1991 - 1993-- "the era of teachers' empowerment"--suggests that teacher initiative is the main route to school change during this period. We know too, that teachers, parents and the principal are motivated by a common mission-- "to do what is best for kids." Left unknown, at the close of 1993, is whether there are any contentious or hidden issues that have potential to be divisive. One that was raised years earlier but never resolved, was the

principal's desire to recreate Thomas as a "really bilingual school."

In Bryk et al. the category of school improvement effort that correlates most strongly with strong democracy is "emergent restructuring."[38] This type of school community begins to examine critically the educational opportunities afforded children, and also teachers' instructional practices. Moreover, the school community commits itself to long-term change. Improving teaching and learning in regular classrooms becomes paramount, as do issues of quality, focus, staff development, and ties to external expertise. A key feature of emergent restructuring schools is the community's ability to agree about the direction that change should take. This leads, in turn, to a dismissal of add-on programs and unfocused initiatives, and an enhanced concern for more strategic, coherent and comprehensive improvement planning.

At Thomas we have analyzed teachers' development along a developmental trajectory. Across a multi-year period which began prior to reform, teachers moved from an interest in finding in-service on "whatever's new," to an acknowledgment that they need to "all be in the same play book," focus their improvement efforts, build more continuity across grade levels, and become more strategic in their planning and action. This development puts them and their school squarely in the category of emergent restructuring.

A contentious issue would pop up at the beginning of the 1993 - 1994 school year, however, that would put both their politics and their school improvement capacity to the test.

Public Conversation about a Hidden Issue

On a hot June day at the very end of the 1992 - 1993 school year, two groups of fifth grade girls started a fight in the hallway. Their teachers separated them and sent them to class, but their battle resumed later in the day when they got to the playground. Several girls from the

monolingual English program were "fighting and pulling hair and scratching" at a similar number of girls from the bilingual program. This eruption was apparently the result of a year's frustration--on both sides--about differences between the two groups. According to Carol:

> At fifth grade the kids are pressured into being cool, and with cool, you're speaking English and not Spanish. . .Even though the kids [in the monolingual program] speak Spanish at home constantly, if you speak to them in Spanish, they will refuse to speak to you in Spanish when they're at school. They will only speak to you in English. So the message that these kids get is that English is cool. Spanish isn't. And there's a huge problem then with self-esteem, with cultural image. . . So if you're in the bilingual program still, you're considered a "brazer," even though you're of the same cultural background as all of the kids that are in the regular program. There have been fistfights. . .awful problems simply because the kids feel that because they are in bilingual, somehow they are not as smart as the monolingual kids. If they had been smarter they would have been transitioned out of it. . .

Exacerbating these perceptions of differences in degrees of "cool" and intelligence, were real differences in the way the children behaved:

> Well, the girls [in the monolingual program] were very mature in their behavior and vocabulary, and my girls [in bilingual] had more recently arrived from Mexico. They didn't have uniforms yet. And it was very much a criticism of, `Oh, you're from another country, you're not, somehow just not [cool]. . .'

At the end of the day, teachers called the students' parents. The episode ended, but it surfaced a long simmering problem. Many parents felt that discipline was lax in the building over-all, while some teachers felt that it was inconsistent across the two programs. Moreover, teachers thought that the principal was part of the problem. Carol said:

> The discipline problems in some of the classrooms--the other fifth grade classroom here that's all English--is just amazing. I don't know how she gets things done. Part of it, I think, is cultural. She's a good teacher but the students are horrendous. They throw things out the windows. The rip assignments up if they don't know how to do it. They leave whenever they want-- to go to the bathroom, get water, whatever. She doesn't have support from the administration. That's a big issue, because there is this great inconsistency. We'll have one kid suspended from the

> bilingual program because he crossed the street at 9 am and then didn't come right in the classroom, and you'll have another [monolingual] student there who has sworn at the teacher and thrown things, and he's almost always hanging out the window but he won't be suspended, and the kids know it. When the administration is inconsistent, teachers don't feel that they are supported.

The fight described above was an unusual event because it was an altercation across programs that took place in the common spaces of the school rather than misbehavior that occurred in the private domain of an individual classroom. As such, it forced a dialogue between the two fifth grade teachers who had angry children to deal with. Most importantly, the conversation reverberated through the faculty, and extended to the broader parent group as well. According to Carol, parents had wanted something done about discipline for a long time.

> Parents [on the LSC] pressured and pressured for a consistent discipline policy. . .But every time they brought it up, either on a pre-agenda meeting [of the LSC] or at the LSC, he [Sanchez] says, `Well, its not as bad as other schools,' and parents don't know how to argue with that.

In fact, the issue for parents was much broader than discipline. They were concerned that as Spanish dominant children assimilated--and moved from the bilingual to the monolingual program--they would lose their culture, and with it respect for their elders. According to Carol:

> The parents of some of my kids don't want them out of the bilingual program--even though most of them are ready to be transitioned--because they don't want their kids to change. To change means--what they see in the kids in the monolingual program is less respect for parents. And I have seen this too. There's a different norm in the [monolingual] classroom. I don't know if it's culture or if it's because the teachers don't understand Spanish, but there's a lot less respect towards the teachers, lot of swearing in Spanish, many more discipline problems than in the bilingual program. And the parents know this. They'll even say, `I know that if my child goes to all-English soon he won't want to go to Mexico, and won't write letters in Spanish anymore, and won't be able to feel proud of who he is.' And so they want to keep them [in bilingual]. Really I feel what they're saying is, `I want [a] maintenance [language program]. I want English because it's necessary, but I also want Spanish because of the cultural issues.

Gloria raises some of the same concerns, but from a parents' perspective:

> Bilingual students separate themselves because they feel guilty about not mastering English. And what is very clear to me is that the schools and the children think that English is worth more than Spanish. The Hispanics themselves think that. I have seen it in my own house, with my children. They say that English is worth more than Spanish because they speak it to you. `We are in the United States,' they tell me. `We are not in Mexico. And here English rules.' And I tell them, `But your roots are Latin. You have to speak your own language well. You need to learn English too. Because if you know the two languages, you are worth as much as two people.' And they laugh and say to me in English, `No Mom!' [translation]

Not surprisingly, many teachers appreciated the respect accorded to them from bilingual students. Patricia suggests that it's one of the things that makes Thomas a "nice place to teach."

> I think that respect is very common, very important in a Hispanic community. Parents really respect educators. It's their culture. You're the teacher and they have a different attitude than people across the city towards teachers. I think a lot of that comes from their heritage and how the teacher in Mexico was viewed. They really still carry that tradition, and they pass it on to their children. And the children maintain that respect while they're in bilingual. That's one of the positive things about Thomas. It makes it a nice place to teach. . .

By 1993, however, the discipline problems--especially among the older students--had grown to such proportions that teachers wanted something to be done.

But just as the discipline issue seemed to be shorthand for a larger set of cultural concerns for parents, so too did it represent a Pandora's Box for teachers. At the heart of the problem were misunderstandings about the methods and aims of the bilingual program itself. And while the Box might be open for some limited discussion within each faculty group, it was not part of the public domain. Carol said,

> We don't really talk about it across the two programs. But we do talk about it amongst the bilingual teachers. . .We don't ever have time to speak to the monolingual teachers about this. . .

It seems interesting, and perhaps disingenuous, that in a school that has created such elaborate communication structures, the impediment to dialogue about this issue is time.

Perhaps Patricia's analysis is more accurate. She says that the full faculty never addresses discipline problems or the deeper issues about bilingual education that linger beneath the surface, because "it's a thing they [bilingual teachers] just won't talk with us about. . ." One reason given for the silence is an interest group politics. Thomas was losing enrollment in 1993, to the magnet schools mentioned previously, and also to a first wave of gentrification that was hitting the area and raising rent beyond the means of many of its families.[39] Lillian suggested that protecting jobs and categorical funds were two reasons that bilingual teachers were reluctant to review their placement and transitioning policies:

> There's money that comes to the bilingual program that doesn't come to the regular program. . .And then, of course, there's the whole struggle to keep bilingual teachers. The whole staff is dependent upon the numbers of bilingual students, because if children leave bilingual, then pretty soon there goes the teacher too.

Kathy agreed that protecting jobs was one factor. Even more problematic, however, was the fact that monolingual teachers like herself felt that it was politically incorrect for them to bring up issues of placement at all.[40] When we asked her if there was a case review or other venue where they might discuss students' placement, she responded:

> That's a real sticky issue. . .It is real political. It gets involved with teachers saying, `That's my job. If you talk about placement you're talking about my job.' So, it gets involved--complicated immediately. I think that to bring it out into the open would be real difficult. . .Even though I am losing enrollment and have only seventeen children registered for my [monolingual first grade] class next fall, [if I brought it up] I would have twenty people jumping down on me saying, "No, No, No." You see, every bilingual child has a folder and they test them to see if English is their second language. And if English is their second language, then they are in the program. Even so, some of the Spanish dominant parents want their

children to be here [in a monolingual classroom] because they want them to hear English all day. . .For example, I had one little girl this year who really didn't understand any English. We talked to her mother and told her that the child would be much better off in bilingual. Eventually the mom agreed. So you can deal with it at the level of an individual child or family. But as a policy about placement and transitioning? I think that its such a sticky issue, I would never bring it up. . . It's the biggest issue of all.

Needless to say, many of the monolingual English teachers were frustrated that they could not give voice to their concerns. Beyond the politics, Patricia suggested that there were real philosophical differences that warranted debate. She described how during the course of her tenure at Thomas she changed some of her own preconceived notions about bilingual education:

I think part of the problem that people have talking about it is that there are different mind sets about bilingual education. [When I first came to Thomas] I used to think, `Ok, work with these kids and get them to learn English and then all their problems are going to be solved.' But now I have a better, broader picture of how language is more a part of a person--who you are. I have learned a lot about language and culture from being here that just wasn't part of my life experience before. But I also know thing that our kids at Thomas are different from say Mr. Sanchez' family or our teachers' families. Those families are really bilingual. They're dual language. They still nurture both languages. The kids at Thomas don't have that luxury. When they leave here no one speaks English to them at home, so what they get as far as learning a second language is limited to what we can give them at school. This is where I have a little bit of a problem comparing our kids to kids who have more advantages. I try to say this respectfully, but some of the bilingual teachers think that I'm trying to put them down: `So, you're saying that our kids can't learn?' `No,' I tell them. `I have never said that, but I am saying that we need to be realistic as to what we can do in a school day.' They respond, `I learned two languages. . .,' `Yeah, but how did you learn two languages? Your mother was able to help you, your mother knows two languages, your father knows two languages. . .' By now, certain teachers have gotten over the labeling. . .we've come to respect each other. I now realize that the cure isn't to learn English. There is a value in knowing two languages, and I didn't know that before. But I still believe that a lot of the [bilingual] teachers do not want a person who's only English-speaking to say that. They don't like it. They resent it. They look at it in a different way.

Initial Planning for a Dual Language Program

Even more troubling to teachers than the discipline problems or philosophical differences that separated them and their children, was the fact that Thomas students were not progressing academically as they should. The majority of teachers were working as hard as they could, but their students were at risk.[41] While the girls' fight may have been the spark that opened up conversation about discipline problems in the school, it was teachers' ability to be reflective about their own instructional practice that enabled them to come together to plan for a new language program in the school.

The discussion started in the core planning team. It involved a large number of teachers, Sanchez, and some parents as well. Several teachers in the monolingual English program were concerned that children were being "held" in bilingual beyond the mandated three years. They were aware that research on the issue was mixed and they wanted to dialogue with teachers in the bilingual program about what Thomas' policy should be. For example, Kathy told us:

> Research is showing that they [students] do better if they stay in bilingual until 6th grade. They stay in their own language. I believe that's correct. And they transition better at 6th grade versus 3rd grade.

Kathy was probably referring to research on maintenance, or late- exit, bilingual models, where children receive instruction in their native language and English for 5 to 7 years. The theory behind this program is that LEP students have time to "catch-up" academically to their English speaking peers while maintaining their native language and culture.[42]

Carol was not opposed to debating the issues. At the same time, however, she was clear about the program that she thought Thomas should adopt, and not at all hesitant to state her case. She advocated for a "maintenance program with dual language." This would extend instruction in

bilingual beyond three years. Most importantly, it would place LEP students and English speakers in the same classrooms, where instruction would take place in both languages. Carol informed her colleagues that research investigating these kinds of programs--and contrasting them with other models--demonstrated that both groups of students outperformed their peers academically on standardized tests. Moreover, these gains extended into high school--long after the program ended.[43] Additionally, Carol said that a maintenance dual language program would ameliorate a lot of the discipline problems that students were experiencing because there would no longer be two distinct groups. It would also address some of parents and teachers concerns about assimilation, because Spanish dominant students would be encouraged to maintain their culture, while their English dominant peers would be taught to respect it. Further, if the new program were eventually adopted school wide, there would be consistency and focus across the grades. Finally, Carol argued that the new program would address the principal's desire to create a unified, "really bilingual school for the community."

Carol took it upon herself to report to the PPAC and LSC about the deliberations of the core planning team on this issue. At one LSC meeting she said:

> One problem at the school is that there is no overriding philosophy regarding bilingual instruction, so that each teacher does her own thing. There is a range of philosophies--from teacher like myself who would like to see a dual-language maintenance program--to others who believe that students should be immersed in English. I think the school needs a dual language program with Spanish dominant teachers instructing in Spanish, and English- dominant teachers working in English. . .The committee [core planning] has discussed this at length and we now feel that there is a need for a program that equates the value of English and Spanish, such as a dual language, maintenance program."

Not surprisingly, Carol found a strong advocate in Sanchez. While he had learned to assume a low profile in meetings of the PPAC and core planning team, at the LSC he supported

Carol, and reminded the council that it had always been his vision to unify the school. Sanchez made the argument for a dual language program even stronger when he suggested that it might address the problem of Thomas' shrinking enrollment. He said,

> We have been losing enrollment--especially Spanish dominant students--and so we may have fewer bilingual teachers in the fall. Everyone will need to be patient with the changes this may cause. I have never liked the idea of running two schools--one that is bilingual and the other that is monolingual. . .There will be about 90 students per grade so that the teachers will have to fight for students no matter what their language background is. For example, in kindergarten there will be 65 students and less than twenty speak only English. Configuring the classrooms will be a challenge. . .I know there will be teachers and some people in the community who will not be comfortable with the new arrangements. But this new school organization gives us an opportunity to be very creative. . .I believe that there is a solution to everything if we all have a common aim and will. Language should really not be an issue that divides us at our school. Let's start this program--a dual language maintenance program--as an experiment in the first grade. The teachers are anxious to try it, and I am too. Let's start there, with the intention that we create a truly bilingual school.

The LSC approved the re-organization, and for the rest of the year a core group of teachers from bilingual and monolingual, as well as parents from both programs, assumed responsibility for planning the new initiative. It became a major focus of the next year's SIP and money was allocated for it in the budget as well.

Conclusion

During the four years of observations, the Thomas school community progressed from a stage of uncertain politics when the principal was new, to a maintenance politics when the first SIP and budget were written, to an emergent strong democracy where contentious issues of bilingual education were debated. Similarly, we saw development in school improvement activities from an early stage of peripheral academic initiatives, to a first stage of systemic change

labeled emergent restructuring. At the end of the journey we are impressed with the progress made by the school community.[44] At this vantage point it is appropriate to step back and ask: How did these developments occur? To answer, we review some of the developments within each the school's three sites of power--among parents, the principal, and the faculty. We also consider the important role of social capital in this immigrant community.

Even before the advent of reform, there was an active parent group at Thomas. Several members of this group cut their teeth in political activity of the broader community, and they brought this experience to bear on the activities of the school. They lobbied for a new principal when it was not yet legally sanctioned to do so. Once Sanchez was appointed, however, they dropped their aggressive stance and replaced it with a supportive one.[45] Individuals like Cerwinski wanted to feel secure that the school had a principal who was committed to them and their children. Once assured of that, however, he and the other parent LSC members had no desire to run the school. Rather, they left operations and to the principal and faculty whom they trusted to do a good job.

The principal is a central figure in this story. Sanchez comes in with a clear vision of the "really bilingual school" that he wants to create, but his initial rhetoric overpowers many. Perhaps his vision is frightening because he attempts to obligate parents and teachers to take responsibility--with him--for the future of the school. He extolls them to become involved, informed and responsible decision makers. Sanchez starts off as a romantic character--passionate about his radical ideas. As the community gets to know him, however, and as he gets to know them, the romance fades and he becomes much more complex. He espouses equality and the full involvement of his school community, but he clearly gives more leeway to his "in" group. He

learns to move to the background in terms of leadership style, and yet he continues to control decision making and school improvement activity such that it aligns with his vision. While this form of leadership has potential to be sinister, it is not. Rather, because Sanchez is thoughtful about and steadfast to his commitment to the students and their families, he is able to facilitate much of the positive growth in school improvement, politics and teacher leadership development that occurs in the school.

The teachers are the most interesting and inspiring group. A core group of teacher leaders was formed prior to reform and Sanchez' arrival. They enact principles critical to creating a self-improving school. Included among these are their dedication to the community, a commitment to being professionals (which they define as honest and hard-working). Most importantly, they demonstrate a willingness to search out new knowledge, be reflective about their practice, self critical and able to change when their students do not attain the academic and social skills that they desire for them. Moreover, their activism in tempered by a pragmatism about the politics of the CPS and the school community. They learn that they can get their parents' support more easily if they involve them early on in faculty deliberations. Similarly, they never forget that their principal remains their supervisor. Thus, they maneuver to stay on his "good side" and strategize for his support for their initiatives as well.

One key to the progress made by this school community in both politics and school improvement activities is social capital. At the advent of reform there is a reciprocity of positive relations--trust--between parents and professionals. Trust, in turn, enables them to work together to overcome problems--like a fragmented first SIP--and eventually surface and debate difficult issues--like the purposes and pedagogy of bilingual education.

Another key to the progress of this school community is the fact that the principal, teachers and parents respect each other's expertise, and domains of work and influence. Parents defer to professionals on school improvement issues, asserting themselves only on decisions where they have direct knowledge--for example, the need for another social worker, uniforms, and a new discipline code. Teachers encourage parents extended involvement even as they accept parents' hesitation to become more involved. They also respect the formal authorities of the principal, even as they take on increasing leadership for decision making and change initiatives at the school. The principal acknowledges that he is "ultimately responsible" for the school and accountable to the community. Thus, he walks a fine line. He influences decision making even as he encourages broad based involvement and participatory government.

That all of this takes place in an immigrant community is noteworthy. In such a setting the distance that separates parents and professionals--with regard to background, culture, knowledge and expertise--is significant. But their common commitment promotes trust. And when trust is combined with respect for different spheres of influence, these resources enable stakeholders to overcome the obstacles that separate them and work productively together.

In the Thomas school community positive social relations enable enhanced democratic participation. This participation, in turn, fosters the development of even stronger social capital. Over time these resources, combined with a search for new knowledge and dedication to strategically using that knowledge, promote systemic educational change.

Endnotes

1. The name of the school and members of its community have been changed to protect confidentiality. A few insignificant details have also been altered for the same reason.

The field work was conducted over a period of four years by a team of researchers from the Center for School Improvement. Headed by the two authors, this team attended most LSC and other public meetings of the school, as well as several community meetings where school issues were discussed. Extensive interviews--and repeat interviews--were also conducted with the principal, teacher leaders, parents and other members of the school community across the four year period. Yanguas interviewed all of the Spanish- dominant parent and community members, and translated these interviews as well.

2. 1990 Census

3. See Fremon, 1988.

4.See Bowles & Gintis (1986) for further discussion of this "transportation of practices." See also Rollow & Bennett (1996) who provide an example of this phenomena in another school community context.

5. This experience stands in sharp contrast with many other schools in the CPS and other urban districts, where parents' involvement in Head Start drops off as soon as participation is no longer mandatory.

6. Parents' comments about this era, in fact, bring to mind formative experiences in Mississippi some thirty years earlier, when the Parent Development Centers--the precursor to Head Start--were first funded. In addition to offering parents' support, these sites operated as places where participants developed their leadership skills and first became invested in the movement for social change. See Greenberg (1990).

7. The *Home Language Survey* is a CPS assessment that is given to all enrolling students. It is used to determine whether they or a member of their family speaks a language other than English at home.

8. The *Functional Language Assessment* is also a CPS instrument. It is used to make bilingual placement decisions.

9. In 1973 the Chicago Board of Education adopted a resolution asserting the concept of bilingual education (Board Report 73-1382). Three years later the Illinois Transitional Bilingual Education mandate was signed into law. This institutionalized transitional bilingual education programs in Chicago and statewide.

10. For discussion of these issues see Collier (1995a & b), Cummins (1989), Hakuta (1986), Ramirez (1991), Wong-Fillmore (1990).

11.Principals have the option of having Category C bilingual students taking the ITBS--an option that Sanchez did not exercise. Spanish speaking students at Thomas did take an academic achievement test called La Prueba. These scores are reported directly to the schools. The district also provides this information to the state, however, it is not included on the annual State Report Card.

12. The number of students enrolled in a program determines teacher positions. Hence, bilingual teachers have an interest in keeping enrollment up.

13. Prior to the passage of PA 85-1418, the CPS enjoyed "home rule" and so had its own administrative certificate.

14. Putnam (1993), p. 163.

15. Bryk, et al. 1993. p. 6.

16. Thomas School was, in fact, one of the case study schools in the State of Reform data base.

17. Bryk et al. 1993. p. 24.

18. See Designs for Change (October, 1989).

19. At Thomas neither of these was done the first year.

20. See Rollow & Bryk (1994).

21. It needs to be remembered that the new council was dependent on Sanchez for training as well as basic information about the school at this time.

22. Bryk et al. (1993) p. 13.

23. Bryk et al. (1993) p. 24.

24. See Bryk et al. 1993.

25. See, for example, Yanguas & Rollow, 1996.

26. Both advocacy groups and individuals were offering training to LSCs--usually for a fee--during these early days of reform.

27. Although Marta implied that everyone was obligated to give their opinion, it should be noted that such references do not appear in PA 85-1418.

28. Such a public presentation from a district superintendent was unusual. Generally personnel matters were discussed in closed session. Presumably, Sanchez had been consulted in advance about Acosta's presentation and had agreed that such information could be shared in a more open

setting.

29. The opening of these new magnet schools resulted, in part, from the community activism described earlier to relieve overcrowding in the area.

30. The exodus at Thomas of the most sophisticated members of the LSC represents a huge problem that has not been adequately addressed--either in the literature about Chicago's reform or as a legislative issue. For a related discussion of issues of student and family mobility in Chicago see Kerbow (1996).

31. According to the *State of Reform Report*, the ability to eliminate long standing programs, and perhaps even more importantly, long standing jobs, represents one of the first signs of an "actively restructuring school." In this report it was generally a few maverick principals that were mounting this challenge to the status quo. The fact that teachers at Thomas were becoming involved in this kind of strategic thinking and action is extraordinary. See Bryk et al. 1993. p. 54.

32. Some advocacy and training groups were encouraging LSC parent representatives to observe classrooms. In a few cases parent representatives came in with checklists and attempted to document what teachers were doing wrong.

33. Bryk, et al. (1993) p. 27.

34. Bryk & Schneider have recently written about the issue of equality as it relates to collaborations between parents and professionals. Their discussion informs our's. See Bryk & Schneider (forthcoming).

35. The passage of reform, and also the offering of an early retirement plan by the state, led to a huge turn-over in the principalship in the CPS. See Designs for Change (1990).

36. Thomas School was, in fact, one of the case study schools in the State of Reform data base.

37. Bryk, et al. 1993, p. 15.

38. Bryk, et al. 1993. p. 54.

39. In fact, it was the most recent immigrants, who tended to have the least money, who were most affected by these changes in the neighborhood. They tended to be Spanish dominant families as well.

40. As a first grade teacher Kathy was most interested in students' initial placement. Because Lillian taught in the intermediate grades, her main concern was transitioning.

41. Thomas had been on the list of one hundred schools with the lowest reading scores in the CPS for several years.

42.Some schools opt for a maintenance bilingual model rather than transitional. In contrast, to transitional, students in a maintenance program receive instruction in English and their native language beyond three years. In such programs English and the native language are each used about half of the time. Maintenance programs afford LEP students additional time (typically 5 to 7 years) to "catch-up" academically to their English speaking peers, while maintaining their native language and culture. Most such programs are in place from kindergarten through 6th grade, by which time it is thought that students are prepared to transition into mainstream, English only programs.

43. Even though transitional bilingual programs were mandated by the CPS in 1973 and the state in 1976, CPS schools currently have the option to choose other models. In the last several years several have adopted a "dual language model." This program typically begins in kindergarten and extends to 6th or even 8th grade. Monolingual English speaking children are placed in the same classroom as LEP students. The language of instruction may vary. Some programs provide most instruction in the dominant language of the LEP students (for example Spanish) for the first several years. By the middle grade, however, the language of instruction is generally split more evenly. Recent research demonstrates that by these grades both language minority and majority students outperform their English monolingual peers on standardized tests--a pattern that continues through high school. One reason for these results may be that instruction in dual language programs has been found to emphasize more "authentic" kinds of instruction (hands-on, experientially-based, cognitive complex, discovery and inquiry pedagogy) rather than relying on more traditional teaching in a structured and sequenced curricula. (For discussion of authentic instruction see Newmann and Wehlage, 1996. For discussion of the different models of bilingual education see Ramirez, 1992; Collier, 1995a; Thomas & Collier 1995).

44.These developments are striking when viewed on their own, and even that much more so relative to the other schools that comprised the data base for *A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago.*

45. Their behavior is not unlike that found in the "Experiences of Actively Restructuring Schools." See Bryk et al. p. 54.

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